





EDITOR: Vel Jaeger

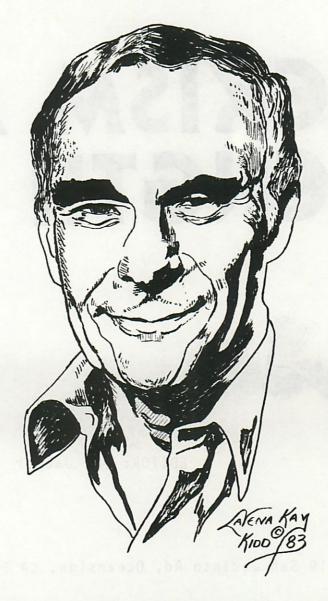
COPY #

Published at: 119 San Jacinto Rd, Oceanside, CA 92054

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MENSA is an international society in which the sole requirement for membership is a score at or above the 98th percentile on any of a number of standard IQ tests. Mensa is a not-for-profit organization which serves as a means of communication and assembly for its members. All inquiries concerning Mensa should be addressed to: MENSA, Dept ST, 1701 W. Third St, Brooklyn NY 11223.

DEDICATION



In January of 1981 this editor sent a letter of encouragement to Paramount Pictures following the announcement of plans to film STAR TREK II. Amazingly, a very friendly reply was sent by the new producer, Harve Bennett, asking for help in getting to know Star Trek's fandom. After recovering from the shock that caused, no time was wasted in cramming the most important data into a two-and-a-half-page letter. And it is with pride that every issue of TREKisM is sent to his office, knowing that this man really is interested in what we fans have to say. To repeat what Teri Meyer said in an editorial in INTERSTAT, "We are a fandom blessed." Thank you, Harve, for listening; we hope the conversations will never cease. In STAR TREK: THE WRATH OF KHAN you have given us the continuation of our dreams for tomorrow, and for that we are eternally grateful.

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ADDITIONAL ART CREDITS: LaVena Kay Kidd - front cover, page 222 Gennie Summers - pages 123, 156 Vel Jaeger - pages 114, 202, 227, back cover

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(Dover, 1969)
Treasury of Art Nouveau Design & Ornament (Dover, 1980)

TYPING: Linda C. Brown, Anonymous

PROOFREADING: LuAnn Brady, Sandra Gent, Kim Knapp, Chris Paterson



editorial ramblings

Traditionally, an editorial takes some stand on a controversial position—in fanzines, this feature has altered somewhat. Instead, we acknowledge assistance and explain problems encountered. At the top of the list of acknow-ledgements must stand Sandra Gent, dear friend and advisor who ran all over San Diego getting the best bargains in printing for me. I've learned more from her about graphics and zine production than I could have from any college production than I could have from any college course. Kim Knapp, who is now my associate editor for our TREKisM newsletter, gets to do all the donkey work of running all over Oceanside to printers, office supply, post office, and everything else I don't have the time to do since working full time. Sandra and Kim were also nabbed for proofreading, along with Chris Paterson and LuAnn Brady, meeting my usual deadline of "yesterday."

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from beginners to names familiar to many zine readers; seeing their names in print for the first time are Linda C. Brown, Jon B. Green, Robert S. Sayes, Ellen Warner, and Barbara Yanosko. Be gentle with your criticisms; we want to keep them around to grow and share more of their talents with us

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I fervently hope that no feelings are hurt by our return to the dreaded asterisk system of denoting contributors who are not members of Mensa. But with a recent change in our national policy which precludes non-members from sub-scribing to our TREKisM newsletter, I feel it is a necessary distinction. I don't like it, and I'm fighting it, but for now we must live with the new policy.

Plans for TREKisM at Length IV are already forming (yes, editing zines is an incurable disease), though the next issue won't be nearly so large and fancy. See you at the mailbox!



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616 Blume Rd, Anderson SC 29631
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*= originally appeared in TREKisM #24 **=originally appeared in KIRK; reprinted with the permission of the author

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Rose belongs to a local ST club, and has had

stories and articles published in zines such as VAULT OF TOMORROW and SAURIAN BRANDY DI-GEST. Her job as an accounting clerk at an insurance company interferes with all this, but supplies the needed credits. She is also a Regional Assistant for the William Shatner Fellowship. 5160 S. Martin Rd, New Berlin WI 53151 DEBBIE GILBERT, at 22, has been a writer virtually all her life, and a Mensan since she was in high school. Recently completing her BA in psychology, she aspires to be a clinical animal behaviorist. When not at school or dancing with the Tennessee Ballet Company, she spends time with her roommate, Penny (a cocker spaniel). Examples of her writing can be found in VISIONS 1 & 2, GUARDIAN 4, ETERNAL TRIANGLE 3, and KOBAYASHI MARU. 5287 Haleville, Memphis TN 38116 JON B. GREEN has been alive for a score and a half years. (How long he was dead before that, we aren't sure.) Apparently his reason for being in the universe is to monitor the video transmissions of the adventures of the crew of the Starship Enterprise. Between broadcasts he has been known to read vast quantities of printed, bound science fiction and related non-fiction texts. He has also from time to time earned money performing in the fields of Electronics Techonology (in which he holds a BS degree) and Computer Programming (about which he can BS for hours). In fact, as a Co-op student at NASA he wrote a very very very, tiny tiny tiny computer simulation of the Space Shuttle. No doubt the success of the entire Shuttle program hinged on the results of his work. In his spare time (between books) he will eat and drink almost anything that tastes good, listen to any kind of music except Country and Western, and watch movies. His favorite sport is watching pro-Toni Hardeman*, 33, single and a former Georgian, includes a BA in Graphic Art as one of four degrees. Her occupation is that of an advertising artist for a newspaper. Though a Trek fan since the only found fandom in 1979. She started 1966, she only found fandom in 1979. She started doing zine art in 1980; other activities include publishing the zine, E'ED PEBNISTA and art director for the BABEL CONFERENCE. In addition to fanor for the BABEL CONFERENCE. In addition to fannish activity, Toni also enjoys swimming, crossstitch, growing flowers, taking care of her new mobile home, her guinea pig "Patches", and doing theme art in a number of media. 6175 W. Kippen Dr SE, Grand Rapids MI 49508 DEVERY HELM* is the pseudonym for a well-known writer of adult Treklit, who prefers to remain incognito. She does consent to it being known incognito. She does consent to it being known that she's married with two kids, is 38 years old, 5'3", 120 lbs, and lives in southeast Ohio. She's been in fandom for more than 3 years now, and this editor was the first live Trekker that she met in person. KAREN C. HUNTER says that her age is "old enough to know better," and that she went to school when she learned more than was in the curriculum. She considers her life too busy because she tries to do too much and is interested in nearly everything. Her idea of heaven is a large library filled with books, a fireplace, and Spock to play (chess) Karen has been an active fan writer for about 8 years now.
630 S. 153rd Circle, Omaha NE 68154
VEL JAEGER was born in Quebec, Canada, and immigrated to Florida at the age of four with the rest grated to Florida at the age of four with the rest of her family. Now 36 and married to a career Marine, other household creatures include 3 children ranging in age from 7 to 12, a black Persian who answers to "Harry Mudd", and a slightly crazed tortoise-shell , Saavika. Her life's ambition is to be a story illustrator and/or portrait artist, but she deals with mundane life by working at whatever comes along, with substitute teacher, printer's assistant, and insurance agency secretary being the most recent jobs. Most of Vel's fannish activity has centered about the ST Special Interest Group she founded 7 years ago for Mensa, and as the Group she founded 7 years ago for Mensa, and as the Southwest Regional Assistant for the William Shat-Her formal education includes a ner Fellowship. BA in German, which of course has nothing to do with her current enrollment at Mira Costa College as an art major. 119 San Jacinto Rd, Oceanside, CA 92054 Lavena KAY KIDD is a professional portrait artist and magazine distributor. Her formal education

includes 2½ years at the Susan B. Anthony School of Nursing, and a diploma from the Famous Artists Correspondence School. She is the mother of 4 (ages 14 to college), who are frequent collaborators for her cartoons, and the grandmother of 15. LaVena's illustrations for her local newsletter (SUNFLOWER SEEDS) have won her four Owl Awards for art, and she is a frequent contributor the the BULLETIN, Mensa's national magazine. 414 S. Main, McPherson KS 67460 GINNA LACROIX*, a Canadian who lives in the Washington, DC area, is a dressage instructor and horse show judge, working freelance both here and thanks to Carol Frisbie, who guided a then-non-writer to a whole new world. She does most of her writing while sitting in airports. Ginna began watching ST in 1966 because William Shatner was starring in the series, and very quickly became a big fan of Kirk as well. 14415 Hoyles Mill Rd, Boyds, MD 20841 <u>STEPHEN MENDENHALL*, 26, has spent a number of</u> years on trips to the Middle East with his father on research. He became hooked on ST when MENAGERIE was first shown--at his bedtime. Stephen's first convention experience took place in 1973, meeting D.C. Fontana but being too shy to speak to her. He's currently job-hunting, spending the free time writing ST stories and articles and keeping the TREKISM editor busy trying to sort through his seemingly unlimited supply of ideas for material. 1510 Cedar BEnd, Ann Arbor MI 48105

CHRISTINE MYERS* reminds us that, as some kinds are born with a silver spoon in their mouths, she thinks she was born (on July 4, 1947) with a pencil in one hand and a can of Blair Spray Fix in the other. She sketched her way through several phases in her life beginning with the Cisco Kid and Hopalong Cassidy, concluding with her current "infatuation" with ST (which has lasted these past 15 years). She leaves it to our imagination to fill in what came in between, but if we were to picture her drawing various Dut it we were to picture her drawing various poses of Zorros, pirate ships, Tom Sawyer and friends, castles, knights, horses, and Dr. Kildare.... She has a job which only serves to support her Trek habit, and considers herself very fortunate to be living at home in Southern California with her wonderful Trek-fen parents. Besides corresponding with all her penfriends, her current interests are collecting teddy her current interests are collecting teddy bears, needlepoint, crochet...Dr. Kildare, knights, castles, Tom Sawyer, pirate ships.... 23712 Twin Oaks Pl, Hidden Hils, CA 91302 FRAN PANABAKER*, 30, is a data entry operator, a member of KIFG, and a video tape editor ex-She created a video tape of traordinaire. ETERNAL LOSER in accompaniment to the Leslie Fish filksong that has become a convention favorite. She also played the part of "subtitle" in STAR TREK: THE HOME MOVIE. 401 S. Belcher Rd, #124, Clearwater FL 33515 BONNIE REITZ* lives with four birds, a lizard, over 200 plants (including orchids) and several thousand books. Both a writer and an illustrathousand books. Both a writer and an illustrator for ST zines, she also does wildlife painting and portraits ("Can you paint out his braces?") and is a flea market addict. 240 W. Market St, Marietta PA 17547

MELODY RONDEAU* is a first-generation Trekker who learned to draw people thanks to Star Trek. She discovered fandom, fanzines, cons and her (future) husband Jim at the Red Hour Festival in 1975. Since then she's delved into fandom as a writer, artist, and most recently editor (THE CLIPPER TRADE SHIP). Melody is currently employed at the Kadabrascope animation studio as a computer graphics artist and assistant ani-1853 Fallbrook Ave, San Jose, CA 95130 <u>LEAH ROSENTHAL</u>*, a lifetime resident of Brooklyn, attended parochial school and graduated with a BA in Art from Brooklyn College. She has worked illustrating children's books, as a dental assistant, and as a teacher; she is currently employed as a secretary. Leah has a notoriously twisted sense of humor and has the gall to perpetrate it upon fandom at large. Or small. One of the smalls is Western TV series, for which she has given a home for stories in the zine WIDE OPEN SPACES. She's been in fandom since 1974, but was an U.N.C.L.E. and STAR TREK fanatic when the shows were first on the air; loves fannish life and aspires to some passable serious art someday, but in the meantime, is content to inspire folks to laugh themselves

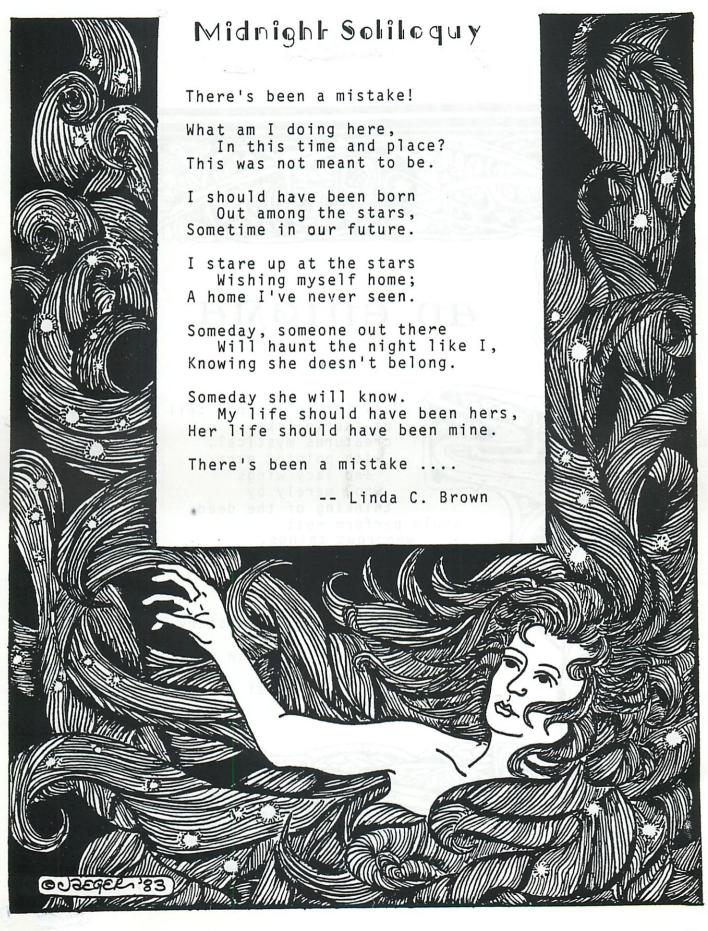
silly; has one cat and interests include mass media, fishing, art, forky-things, nature, the cosmos, wandering, haunted houses, and tall actors in ponchos. 925 E. 14th St, Brooklyn NY 11230 EMILY C. ROSS describes herself as having dark blonde hair, blue eyes, big glasses, 5'5" and a size 12. Having been a physics and math major in college and an ex-Air Force officer, she is currently an unemployed computer programmer, married, with a teenaged son. Emily considers herself a pretty fair bowler and a fanatical bridge player; she's a member of the L-5 Society, the Planetary Society, Allies for Star Trek, and the William Shatner Fellowship. A17 Dunailie Dr., Nashville TN 37217
ROBERT S. SAYES*, 30, lists among his interests aviation and space flight, railroading (both model and prototype), tropical fish, citrus hortaculture, engineering (bridges and other large construction projects), writing, meteorology, and geology. He lives with his parent in Florida, though he was born in Indiana and He lives with his parents yearns to visit again with relatives in Kansas. He graduated from Florida State U with a degree in Geography, but since there's not much to be had in that job market he keeps busy running a lawn care business 1560 Cristobal Dr, Tallahassee FL 32303 <u>PETER SCOTT</u>, when asked if he cared to deny the charge of putting Kwik-Gro in the ship's hydroponics farm, resulting in the kidnapping of another crewman by a giant sex-starved amaryllis, replied in his defense that he was but a paltry 22 years of age, having just graduated from Cambridge University, England, in Computer Science, and was at that very moment emigrating to a new life in Los Angeles, working as a programmer for the navigation section of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory. He had acquired this taste for the Land of the Free during many vacation visits spent working at the Griffith Observatory over the past three years. He had never been interested in botany, only astronomy, science fiction, yoga, computers, writing and movies. Faced with such a woebegone story, the court was moved to acquit the defendant 3325 Primera Ave, Apt 7, Los Angeles CA 90068 LINDA SLUSHER*, born in 1959, is a secretary who hopes to start college soon and, eventually, to become a systems analyst. She discovered ST in 1975. Linda plays chess (anyone who wants to play by mail is welcome to write), is interested in most ny mail is welcome to write), is interested in most forms of music, and collects memorabilia from all foreign countries, particularly Japan. Some of her other interests are: fantasy, Victoriana, travel, astronomy, trivia, stage magic, anthropology, zoology, plants, the Civil War, SFX, Oriental art—the list goes on and on. 755 Stelzer Rd, #53, Columbus OH 43219
VIRGINIA LEE SMITH* is 38, with a husband and son.
She works "part time" (her quotes) at her husband's restaurant. Virginia likes SF, especially ST, collects tarot decks, has a warped view of life, and spends all her spare time reading. Her art is well-known not only in this country, but in many English zines, too. 17 S. Crawford, Daneville IL 61832 <u>GENNIE SUMMERS*</u> has been a ST fan since 1966, hav-Ing been turned on to science fiction by the old Flash Gordon adventure strip at an early age. Being an older fan, she sometimes refers to her-self as the "geriatric Trekker." Gennie's formal art training ended with high school, but her love of drawing has kept her busy ever since, contributing to fanzines too numerous to count. also interested in other media SF, including STAR WARS, BATTLESTAR GALACTICA, and BUCK ROGERS. She lives with and cares for her elderly parents, and has begun submitting stories to fanzines this year. 104 N Spring St, Rt 2, Cassville MO 65625 V.L. THORN (Ginny) is a transplanted Sunflower Tborn in Topeka) who, after much travelling during childhood and with her Navy husband, finally settled in Illinois. She attended the U of Dubuque IA too briefly; marriage produced two children. Several years later the music major-turned-secretary/bookkeeper, computer translator and trouble-shooter became a dedicated beach bum and sun-lover. Ginny joined Mensa 4 years ago and discovered TREKisM as a result, and enjoys collecting and trading zines with trusted fan friends. Her ages is a deep, dark secret but she will admit to being 40+ (looks 39?) and in good shape! 1519 Roxbury Ct, Davis IL 61019

ELAINE TRIPP* has been a ST fan since 1970, and became active in fandom after reading CONTACT 4. She has had art and poetry published in a variety of fanzines. Other favorite shows include STARS! & HUTCH and HILL STREET BLUES, and she still en-joys Saturday morning cartoons and Japanese animation. She is presently working as a clerk/ typist in a social security office in Queens. 24 Humboldt St, Apt 17F, Brooklyn NY 11206 BARBARA WALKER* is a professional wildlife artist now concentrating on portraits of dogs and horses A member of numerous art societies, Barbara's paintings hang in businesses and private collections on four continents. Born in England, she's now settled in Texas with her retired Air Force husband. Rt 2 Box 925A, Adkins, TX 78101 <u>ELLEN WARNER*</u>, Rowena's sister (see next listing is your average 16-year-old "A" student. Her interests include writing short stories and poetry collecting GONE WITH THE WIND memorabilia and seashells, watching old movies, and singing. ROWENA WARNER* is 31 years old and has been an ex coutive legal secretary for 13 years. Her wide-ranging interests include astronomy, Vincent Van Gogh & writing ST poetry, articles, and stories. Her work has appeared in STARDATE, VISIONS, and VAULT OF TOMORROW. She has also published two zines of her own: MORNING OF THE SIXTH DAY and ATYPICAL. 4801 Preston Drive, Louisville, KY 40213 MORIA WASHBURN submitted the following "biography Once upon a time there was an imaginary geologist who wrote imaginary stories about imaginary characters for imaginary reasons, and who lived in an imaginary house in an imaginary neighborhood in a metropolis of questionable authenticity. Now the imaginary neighborhood (aptly characterized decades past by a wise sage as "the Tulsa that nobody knows") was slightly warped; and the imaginary house (also residence of psychic phenomena and an occasional oppossum under the bathtub) was slightly warped; and the imaginary geologist (we won't go into that, children) was slightly warped; so it was only natural that the imaginary geologist's imaginary stories were slightly warped. And, dear reader, if all of the above counds involved. if all of the above sounds imaginary and/or slightly warped--please remember to consider 822 S. 63 W Ave, Tulsa OK 74127 MEL. WHITE* has just begun drawing for fanzines last year, including caricatures and cartoons, as well as "straight" illos. She's a researcher/ programmer at the Texas Tech Medical School, and is married with 2 children. Mel's most recent work can be seen in GALACTIC DISCOURSE 4. 302 E. Purdue, Lubbock TX 79403 CATHERINE L. WHITEHEAD, 36, is an X-ray technician, and lists her major interests as reading, writing, poetry, archaeology, Harrison Ford, horses, dogs, and young people. Cathie is single and lives with her mother and a variety of canine refugees from the animal shelter (3, at last count). She is also co-editor of ANTITHE-SIS, a general SF zine. 4020 Woolslayer Way, Pittsburgh PA 15224 BARBARA J. YANOSKO lists her three states in life as: teacher of quantitative methods in business at Humboldt State University; wife and mother of a teenage boy (understudy to Vulcan) and a ten-year-old Earther girl (but she can raise either or both brows); and closet Trekker and bridge player. In her spare time she is a graduate student in San Diego at USIU. 3170 Brian Ct, Arcata CA 95521

BEVERLY C. ZUK* has been illustrating fanzines as long as this editor can remember--especially R&R, ARCHIVES, and ACCUMULATED LEAVE. Bev is also a writer, with novels such as THE THIRD VERDICT, and THE HONORABLE SACRIFICE still in 24 E. 13th Pl, Lombard, IL 60148

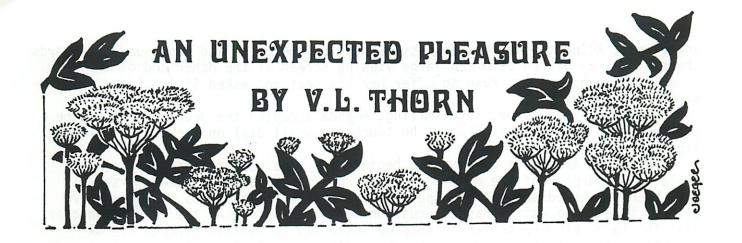
An asterisk (*) following a name indicates that the contributor is not a member of Mensa.







Midnight Solltegay



Amanda Grayson looked up thoughtfully from the note she'd found on her desk, an invitation to attend an important dinner meeting at the president's home that evening after classes. The tenor of the message left no doubt in her mind that the summons was of monumental importance since rumors of a visit by an impressive alien ambassador had been circulating the campus for months. It was significant to Amanda that as the only professor of Alien Evolution and Language Development in the Department of History she would be a logical choice for a welcomming committee--if the rumors were correct. But she had dismissed the rumors as student wishful thinking. The idea of an alien VIP visiting a small college of eight hundred students and a limited curriculum seemed too farfetched to take seriously.

Nevertheless...something was in the air. And, perhaps, this

evening would tell the story veritablement....

She cleared her desk and checked her briefcase for the examination tapes she'd intended to review after dinner, and locking the door behind her, hurried down the hallway towards the library wing. Just enough time to catch the airbus back to her apartment after she'd picked up the new Vulcan/Romulan reference she'd ordered. Then a few hours of lesson schedules for the computer followed by a quick shower before the hop in her mini-shuttle to the president's home.

Amanda always enjoyed visits to the president's residence and this trip was no exception. Approaching the dwelling--which was built into a grassy hillside--was tricky and she always had to make a second pass to find the parking annex. Trees and shrubbery dominated the area, creating a park-like atmosphere, and unless one knew there was a home under the sod it would pass unnoticed to the casual observer. The entryway was situated behind an outgrowth of creeping vines that sprawled over an undisciplined pile of colored limestone, and an artificial waterfall was the first clue that human hands had fashioned shelter here. The glass doors and adjacent windows were masked with greenery and wind chimes of precious woods and crystal formations from other planets. The president himself had laughingly dubbed the foyer "the green room" and on informal occasions had referred to it as "the jungle." But on sultry summer days Amanda looked forward to the cool, quiet atmosphere that permeated the Jensen residence beyond the leafy welcome.

She heard a subdued murmur in the living area as she restored her entry identification card to her purse, recognizing several voices even before entering the long, dimly lit formal room. The president's wife, Ginelle, hurried to greet her, at the same time beckoning to the android maid to bring refreshment. Waving aside the offering of snacks

and drinks, Amanda kissed her hostess lightly on the cheek and continued on towards the small group seated before a large viewing screen at the other end of the room. A tall, sandy-haired man rose to offer her his seat and asked if she cared for a drink.

"No thank you, Peter," and smiling, Amanda accepted the deep chair that the president had vacated, watching as he touched a small dial on the wall to dim the lights.

"Now that Amanda is here we can begin. The tape you are about to see will explain the purpose of the meeting and, perhaps, put a stop to the rumors that have been whispered about the campus lately. After the tape has finished there will be time for questions and discussion before dinner." At the turn of another dial the large viewing screen brightened instantly to exhibit strange hieroglyphic writing which was accompanied by English translation. The expectant

silence was broken as a voice addressed them in flat, alien tones.

"To the people of Earth, the people of Vulcan extend greetings and appreciation at this opportunity to express our desire for diplomatic relations between our two worlds. It is the purpose of this tape to acquaint you with necessary cultural information prior to the actual visit of our ambassador to your planet." The tape continued in the same vein, explaining basic courtesies and expectations customary to Vulcan dignitaries, and Amanda absorbed the information eagerly, taking in the details of dress and protocol, at the same time assessing the obviously intelligent demeanor of the speaker. Following a short pause, the scene suddenly faded to be replaced by a figure identified as the Vulcan ambassador himself. Amanda covered an involuntary gasp as she studied the tall figure, noting the crisp, dark hair, the amber brown eyes, and the full lips that seemed to be on the verge of smiling. She was aware of basic Vulcan physiology but had never been able to study one of the beings so closely before.

//He's very handsome! And he appears to be almost...human!// She stared in fascination at his regal bearing, the delicately tipped ears, and the strange bronze cast to his complexion. "Princely" formed in her mind without prodding, and she snapped back to attention as she realized the tape had progressed to a documentary about Vulcan government and philosophy. The ambassador was explaining the basics of their council and some of the primary ancient beliefs of deities. Next, he spoke a few words of Vulcan and Amanda was mesmerized by the strange gutteral expressions that escaped with such delicate ease from the ambassador's mouth. He appeared to be looking right at her and she had to remind herself that she was viewing a filmed tape and that he was really only staring at a camera.

The documentary continued with scenes of Vulcan topography, architecture and resource centers. A trip through the Space Central complex stretched on through levels of technology concerned with defense capabilities, and Amanda caught herself again studying the faces with a sense of disbelief—as though she were, in reality, watching an old science fiction film. "Movies" were a thing of the past, delegated to museum theaters where one could view them during festivals and holidays for a special fee. But these beings exist, she cautioned herself sternly; soon one of them would actually step foot on Earth! She concentrated on the windup of the visual tour of the planet and all too soon the tape came to an end. The room lighting returned as the president rose to his feet and folded his hands behind his back, his face enigmatic and thoughtful. His gaze roved to Amanda and lingered as she haltingly asked,

"When is the ambassador coming?"

The others chimed in with additional questions until Peter held up his hand for quiet.

"It will take about a month for him to complete preparations and embark from Vulcan. However, his ship will be making two other stops before entering our solar system which will extend the travel time; but barring emergencies or

accidents he should reach Earth approximately three months from now." Jensen

paused as though his next words deserved special emphasis.

"Although the ambassador has been Vulcan's diplomatic representative to many other planets for several decades, this is Earth's first physical contact with a member of the Vulcan government in the history of the Federation--truly a momentous occasion!"

There was silence as the group acknowledged the seriousness of the president's words, then the athletic director cleared his throat noisily.

"Pete, will we have a chance to meet him personally or is he to be shuttled

across campus surrounded by bodyquards?"

The president rocked back on his heels and nodded towards the director. "He will be visiting other points of political interest first, of course, and will have government advisors and assistants accompanying him on this tour. I doubt that security will be any less than for other foreign dignitaries who have visited our area, but the campus will be screened just prior to the ambassador's arrival and measures will be taken to avoid any 'incidents'. To answer the rest of your question, we are tentatively scheduling a large reception the evening of the tour here at the college, and all of you are expected to attend even though it will happen during vacation shutdown." He smiled broadly and pinned Amanda with a discerning look.

"As professor of Alien History, Amanda, this visit holds a great deal of potential for you as well as the college. I would appreciate your allowing the Vulcan ambassador to observe your classroom in action even though it will be summer session. I suspect you might have a chance to talk personally with him and, perhaps, talk him into joining your classroom discussion. I have been told that he is very much interested in a student exchange program—that is one of the

primary reasons for visiting our campus."

Amanda nodded solemnly, swallowing this bit of news eagerly. A Vulcan ambassador--in her classroom! She would have to plan an especially intriguing outline for that day, one that might interest the ambassador and induce him to volunteer comments. It was a challenge she couldn't refuse.

Conversation flowed around her unnoticed, questions and answers concerning the reception--what kind of refreshments to serve this unique alien and his entourage--but Amanda was lost to it all, submerged in plans for an historical confrontation. The president's wife interrupted the babble to announce dinner and Amanda found herself being virtually hoisted out of her coccoon by a young professor from the Music Department.

"Come on, Amanda, time to give the brain a rest," he whispered engagingly, pulling her resolutely towards the dining wing. "Lady Ginelle has undoubtedly

prepared her usual feast and we can't afford to miss it!"

It was, indeed, a bounteous repast and the colorful table seemed to stimulate animated, good-natured argument among the hungry guests.

The weeks passed quickly, Amanda becoming engrossed in finals and the prodding of two or three lagging students. Graduation seemed more subdued than usual, almost as if it were just another day as the campus began taking on the nervous attitude of gearing up for the prestigious visit. Classrooms acquired new wall panels; audi-visual screens and illumination inserts were polished almost to invisibility while shrubs and flowers were pruned and rearranged with particular care by the Horticultural Department. The grounds and buildings literally glowed with anticipation and Amanda found herself admiring the "new look" the small college had assumed. Secretly she pondered the lasting effect of the ambassador's visit.

Only twelve students had signed up for the summer session class, and Amanda chided herself for feeling embarrassed at the small turn-out. These students

were obviously the bravest of the lot and she would do all she could to make them feel at ease and instill them with confidence. She was reminded again of her first day, facing a crowded classroom after years of field research; now she would be briefly practicing research in her own classroom! It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and might never happen to her again and she hoped to be able to remember every moment in detail for her latest research paper. She was sure that she would never forget that handsome face.

The students were waiting outside Amanda's classroom door when she arrived, trying to project a sophisticated facade over their breathless anticipation. She opened the period with a last minute admonition to behave naturally in front of the alien visitor--although she was beginning to worry about her own nervousness. A new garment, purchased from the fashionable boutique on the edge of town, was meant to bolster her self-confidence, and her hair had been carefully gathered into a soft bun at the back of her head. She was a scientist and a teacher, but today she felt different somehow, as though something was going to happen which would change her life completely. As the students began the assignment for the day, Amanda wandered over to the open windows overlooking the concourse. She had insisted on a room with windows when she had accepted the post four years before, preferring natural lighting and fresh air for her students rather than the sterile, controlled environment of most of the other areas. Gazing at the green expanse outside she remembered the forbidding desert terrain of the ambassador's Would he be uncomfortable in this verdant atmosphere, eager to return to the dry, arid world where he'd been born? She began to withdraw into speculation, imagining what it would be like to live on a planet judged to be barren by human standards, virtually uninhabitable except for the advanced technology that enabled survival by the adaptive Vulcans. So lost in thought was she that the light touch on her arm went unnoticed until a voice whispered,

"He's here, Dr. Grayson!"

She turned slowly to find several tall, stern-faced figures standing just inside her classroom door. Peter was with them and advanced towards her, a fixed smile indicating the formality of the situation. Half-way across the room he looked back and extended his hands in introduction.

"Ambassador Sarek, may I present Dr. Amanda Grayson." In the silence that followed, Amanda thought she heard someone sigh--then realized it was her own breath which had involuntarily stopped at Peter's welcome. She walked smoothly towards her alien guest, noting again his regal bearing, the faint promise of a smile about his mouth, and the strange light that seemed to emanate from his dark, secretive eyes.

"Ambassador Sarek, I am honored by your visit. Would you care to remain for a while to observe our session?" She watched him as he gazed around the room, studying the holographs and artifacts in the display cases which had been built into the walls. Special lighting enabled them to be viewed from any point in the room and her students had found them relatively absorbing. Now it seemed the Vulcan ambassador was fascinated with them, too. Having finished his cursory inspection, he faced Amanda amiably.

"Indeed, I had hoped to observe your classroom procedures since I have studies several of your research tapes, Dr. Grayson, and am interested in the similar field of our own educational process." He turned back towards Peter and his associates to dismiss them.

"You may continue the tour, Gentlemen; I will stay awhile to acquaint myself with Dr. Grayson's methods and will join you later." He ignored the lifted eyebrows at his solitary decision, cutting off any chances for argument with a raised hand, and patiently waited until the others had left the room. Then clasping his hands behind his back he strolled over for a closer look at several oil prints

of distant solar systems, nodding encouragingly at Amanda, the watching students momentarily forgotten.

"A very nice collection, if I may say so. Where did you get them?"
Amanda smiled and tried to appear casual as she leaned against a display

case to quiet her shaking knees.

"I have a standing invitation to purchase artifacts from explorers throughout the galaxy. Since I have been unable to visit other planets as yet, due to government regulations, I obtain items as best I can, using historical data to assure authenticity. Of course, it has taken a great number of years to collect everything that you see here..." She faltered under his inquisitive gaze and walked back to her desk to regain her confidence. Then gathering together forms for the short quiz she'd planned for the students, she dispensed the special pens which were used at each console. Sarek examined one of the components curiously while she explained how answers were fed into the department computer which produced a daily print-out of each student's performance. The results would be fed back into the main computer to be stored until the end of each quarter when all grades were automatically released to the dean's office on microfilmed reports. On the last day of each semester students could find out whether or not they qualified for graduating credits in each subject. She distributed the voice printout quizzes and handed one to Sarek for his perusal while she gave final instructions. As the students bent over their assignments Amanda rejoined Sarek with a questioning smile.

"Most interesting," observed the ambassador. "We have a similar method on Vulcan with the exception that all testing is done in a large auditorium at the same time by various instructors. The smaller classroom areas are used only for discussion. It just seems more logical to do it that way." He looked at her as though expecting argument, but Amanda shrugged aside his undefinable stare with a slight frown at several eavesdropping students. Motioning him to follow, she walked quickly to a large glassed-in cubicle in one corner of the room, adjusted the enclosed monitor to include all of the students, and dropped into one of the

two chairs facing the screen.

"We find a more individualized system better, Ambassador. It seems to create better relationships between professors and students, stimulating more interest in a variety of subjects and encouraging less aggressive young people to assert themselves. Take language, for instance. When a new culture is encountered, the students feel free to ask questions about the language they wouldn't ordinarily ask in a large group. The professors try to spend more time with those students who need personal attention which, in a very large group, is impossible. And, along with their regular, required courses, comprehending alien language and cultures can be difficult for first year students, even though they may be very intelligent." She was instantly amused as her guest's eyebrows almost disappeared into his hair.

"Very commendable, Dr. Grayson; however, Vulcan children are trained from birth to be independent, at the same time accepting traditions and educational formats that have been designed to efficiency and logic. We find that our young people adapt readily to serious study when placed in the proper...environment." He folded his arms across his chest and shook his head at the monitor screen.

"Experimentation in small groups is costly and invites rebellion. Futhermore, Vulcan students would never have to be monitored as you are doing now---especially at this level."

"It really isn't necessary here, either, Ambassador. I merely want to keep

an eye on them in case one of them has a question--"

"If they have done their homework there should be no need for questions. Unless, of course, you have not supplied the proper instructions."

"Don't Vulcan students ever ask questions?" Amanda's eyes widened in feigned

innocence as she pointedly ignored his inadvertant reproof.

"They have access to enough reference material so that verbal questions are unnecessary. We have a well developed library system which is hooked into each learning center, and it is available at all times to adults and students alike. Vulcan citizens never consider education to be complete upon graduation; we continue to explore and investigate all aspects of life until the day we die." His eyes regarded her seriously as though unsure whether to proceed to his next revelation.

"We consider a 'degree' merely one step to be taken to reach another. Our classrooms frequently contain people of all ages who are seeking to improve their

knowledge of one subject or another."

"We have similar opportunities on earth, Ambassador Sarek," Amanda smiled courteously, determined to match every challenge while swallowing the suspicion that the two of them had been comparing apples and oranges. "We refer to it as a form of adult education. It was designed for those who were unable to get an adequate early education or who want to advance their expertise in one field or another and it is offered world-wide throughout the multilingual educational system. There are no restrictions on subject or motivation--individual incentive is desired."

Sarek nodded thoughtfully, beginning another tack.

"We find the study of your English language most--interesting. Its inconsistencies are puzzling at times and we often wonder how you avoid major misunderstandings. For instance, many of your words are similar in spelling and pronunciation but have very different meanings. It seems to us that very little adjustment for these problems have been made over the centuries, and we would like

to suggest some helpful changes--"

"There have been several attempts at improving our common language,"
Amanda interrupted smoothly. "But none of them have proved successful, rather, they tended to confuse the situation even more. And we have concluded that rather than upset millions of students who have already absorbed one uniform set of rules, it would be best to maintain the present mode. We feel the acceptance of one standard is more convenient, and we don't promote changes in the vital field of communication."

Silence followed Amanda's dissertation and she thought their small difference of opinion had been settled. Rising from the hard chair, she led the way back through the center of the classroom to her private office, intending to offer her guest a glass of fruit juice. He had not spoken following her interruption, she reflected, as she filled two glasses and congenially offered one to him. He sipped the juice tentatively and nodded his appreciation as she looked away thoughtfully, contemplaing their atypical exchange. Sarek's next words caught her unprepared, however, and she glanced at him with dismay.

"On Vulcan, Dr. Grayson, young people are encouraged to think and investigate on their own. We do not pamper our students." Further reproach was cut short by

her instinctive flare of indignation.

"We do not pamper our students, Mr. Ambassador!"

"I did not mean--" Sarek hastily put down his glass as faint alarm spread over

his features, his skin flushing a dark green.

"Our students are given every opportunity to pursue subjects that are compatable with their mentality and career selection; giving them the necessary assistance to gain the utmost from their studies does not favor their weaknesses, it strengthens them-gives them confidence that they won't be dropped for every mistake they make. If they don't understand something, they feel comfortable about asking for help--"

"Dr. Grayson, I did not intend to excite you--"

"I am not excited, merely disappointed in your interpretation of our methods.

I do believe, Ambassador Sarek, that your own alien research was not as complete as it might have been!" The shock in his eyes brought an abrupt halt to her scolding and she gasped in realization of her own audacity. Groping for a proper apology and finding none, she collapsed into a nearby chair with a rueful sigh.

"Forgive me, Sir. I think we have just failed in the first attempt to

surmount cultural differences..."

Sarek regarded her silently, his expression softening at her apparent discomfort.

"It does seem that we have stumbled on our first try, doesn't it?" He seated himself opposite her, cupping his hands together on the table between them. And again she thought she glimpsed the shadow of a smile on the enigmatic face.

"Truce?" She held out her hand timidly in customary human courtesy only to hastily withdraw it upon remembering Vulcan distaste towards physical contact. But Sarek caught her hand before it disappeared under the table, and held it lightly for a moment.

"Truce." He waited quietly, then changed the subject in what she thought sounded like a sigh of relief. "Are you coming to the reception this evening,

Dr. Grayson? Perhaps we can make a fresh start."

Responding to the end-of-period buzzer, Amanda rose almost regretfully and

smiled her reply.

"Yes, I am going. I wouldn't miss another chance to debate with you for all the Antarian glow water in the galaxy!" And nodding benignly at his consternation

over her unlady-like expression, Amanda returned quickly to her desk.

Sarek followed her slowly, halting on the fringe of students gathering around her to discuss the exam and the following day's assignment. Several times he opened his mouth as if to add something to the dialogue, then apparently thinking better of it, motioned them to continue. However, one of the students boldly directed a question to him while the others waited breathlessly for their distinguished visitor to speak.

"I would be pleased to expound on your query...but feel that Dr. Grayson is the primary authority in this class and that you should pay attention to her theories only. Perhaps when I have become more accustomed to your methods at some time in the future and I have ocassion to visit you again, I can dutifully answer your questions." Amanda looked at him in surprise, translating his regretful glance as an uncharacteristic surrender. She felt slightly victorious for the moment, at the same time admitting that his inherent stubborn qualities paralleled human behavior.

He had moved almost reluctantly towards the door in an attitude of departure. "I must be going now; my personal aide will be wondering if I've become lost and I don't want the entire militia combing the campus for me. It has been a very interesting visit and I hope each of you may someday visit my planet. If you do, I hope you will seek out my residence for an exchange of greetings. Thank you," he pronounced slowly, as though the words were unfamiliar to him. "It has been an unexpected pleasure."

The sincere applause startled him but he bowed solemnly, and backed out of the room with dignified steps. Amanda stared after him, remembering the smile in his

eyes while she mentally counted the hours until the reception.

It had been simply impossible to make the reception on time. Amanda hoped to slip into the auditorium unnoticed, and thanking the patrol officer for his help, hurried to the side entrance only to find it locked. Faced with the inevitability of a late "grand entrance", she walked quickly around the building to the wide, well lit front door where discreet attendants observed her approach and screened her identification. Taking a deep breath and smoothing her hair self-consciously she moved into the brightly lit auditorium as unobstrusively as she could. But she

had taken only a few steps before Peter's voice called loudly from a cluster of quests nearby, and all eyes swung towards the door.

"Amanda, over here. We've been waiting for you..." And detaching himself

from the others, he strode purposefully in Amanda's direction.

"I'm sorry I'm late, Peter, a little problem with my air car--got stranded on the parkway until a friendly patrol came along. I thought for a while I might not be able to make it at all." She absently removed her gloves, her eyes straying casually around the large gathering.

"We thought that's probably what had happened." Peter grinned with good humor. "The ambassador asked for you several times but we told him you'd been

delayed. We were just about to send a search party out for you--"

"Thank you, Peter, but I'm fine now." There was no sign of the ambassador anywhere but she couldn't bring herself to ask Peter where he was. "Isn't that Professor McNaughton over there?" She steered Peter away from the entrance, hoping to melt into the throng of people who had, thankfully, resumed their

noisy chatter.

"Yes, why don't you go talk to him while I get you a drink and a snack." Peter turned away in the direction of the buffet table which labored under a large selection of sandwiches and salads and a large punch bowl. Amanda walked briskly over to the familiar figure standing near a window. McNaughton was not one of her favorite people but he had been helpful in supplying research references when she needed them, and she knew she would undoubtedly be cornered with his long-winded philosophy eventually anyway. The ambassador was not visible anywhere from what she could see, but she was sure to bump into him before the evening was over, she mused. With a heartfelt sigh she suddenly realized that the night would be very boring until she did!

"Dr. McNaughton? How nice to see you again. Have you received any new

references on alien culture lately?"

4

The crowd had thinned noticeably several hours later when she finally spotted Sarek. He had apparently been there all along, seated in a far corner with his aides grouped around him. As she watched, he greeted many of the college students and staff in rapid progression, exchanging words with visitors from neighboring universities, sipping his drink intermittently, and searching the room with a glance whenever there was a lull in conversation. She noted that he rubbed his forehead frequently as though it ached, and she felt a pang of sympathy for him at the same time marveling at how he managed to appear alert and interested in the people filing past him. There were probably over five hundred guests at the gathering and she suspected that had she been in the Vulcan's place, she'd have been completely exhausted by now.

Amanda flushed somewhat guiltily for staring until she realized that he was entirely unaware of her scrutiny as were others around her. Chiding herself gently, she joined Peter and Ginelle near the buffet table as guests began saying their good-byes. The last of the seemingly endless line of greeters had dispersed from the Vulcan group, and out of the corner of her eye, Amanda saw Sarek rise

stiffly to his feet and move away from the others.

For a moment she thought he was coming towards her but swallowed her disappointment dutifully as he approached another dignitary and began an animated conversation with him.

//The evening is still young,// she reassured herself, refusing to glance up at the chronometer on the wall. //I must speak to him once more before he leaves... After all, he did ask me if I would be here tonight...//

She watched him openly then, noting the clasped hands behind his back, the gentle curl that had appeared here and there in the dark hair, and the erect stance of one who commands respect. He was engaged in earnest discourse, and



Amanda knew she couldn't stand there waiting in such obvious anticipation. She drifted back to the buffet table which had been decimated by the large attendance, and selected the last green mint that had survived the evening. One of the professors' wives attempted a weary prattle, but soon lost interest when Amanda answered in monosyllables, as though her thoughts were elsewhere.

She wandered over to the chair where she'd left her lacy wrap, and was just about to tell Peter and Ginelle that she was leaving when she felt a hand grip

her elbow and a familiar voice murmur close to her ear,

"Dr. Grayson, I'm so glad you could make it. I have been waiting to continue our conversation of this afternoon--" and before she could breathe a reply, Sarek steered her firmly out of the emptying auditorium into the shadows near the fountain.

At first she suspected an ulterior motive for his actions, then had to stifle an irrisistable urge to giggle when he turned towards her and launched into their unfinished debate. She joined in good naturedly after a moment, peering at him incredulously in the darkness as he tried to convince her of his theories. Even in the darkness she could feel the hypnotic gaze of his dark eyes, and found that she was agreeing with him out of an inability to respond logically. Suddenly Amanda sensed a difference in Sarek's speech and was tempted to ask if something was wrong when he gasped in pain, clutching his mid-section as he sank slowly to the grass. She froze in panic, then knelt beside him to grope for his pulse, only to realize there was none. He tried to speak to her and she bent close to his face to make out the words; then pulled back in alarm and disbelief.

"You're what?!"

"I'm dying, Amanda--please go and find Sootran, the Vulcan attendant who was with me this evening. He should still be waiting to accompany me back to my

quarters..."

She ran, stumbling on the ridiculously high heels she'd purchased for the reception, and found the other Vulcans standing in the same place where Sarek had spent most of the evening. At first they didn't comprehend here babbling; but eventually an elderly pale-faced figure stepped forward.

"I am Sootran--where is the ambassador?"

*

The events during the next few hours passed so swiftly that later even Amanda had trouble remembering them. Sootran had followed her back to Sarek's side and confirmed what the ambassador had revealed just moments before. The Vulcan healer insisted Sarek be removed to his quarters immediately, and when Amanda insisted on going with them his icy stare threatened to crystalize her on the spot.

An air-ambulance was summoned to transport the three to the quarters where the Vulcan staff had been assigned, and the small party moved quickly into Sarek's bedroom. Even then Amanda refused to leave, grasping Sarek's hand with ferocity, trying to will the unconscious Vulcan to respond. The healer soon prevailed, how-

ever and after initiating a healing trance, drew her into the outer room.

Amanda fidgeted with desperation, pacing outside the door of Sarek's room and repeatedly demanded an explanation of his illness. Sootran watched her with distaste, then realizing it was the only means to calm her ranting and raving, haltingly intoned an analysis.

"The trip to earth has apparently caused the onset of a serious condition that may or may not be reversable." He held up a pleading hand to ward off Amanda's

renewed pleas and continued hastily.

"I detected the symptoms during the past few earth days and had hoped to postpone any treatment until we could return to our home planet. Having never before dealt with this situation under such unusual circumstances, I am not sure even now that a healing trance can help him. On Vulcan..." he paused, hesitating to reveal any further privileged knowledge to this unsettling human female. "On Vulcan I could summon the cure without any problem; but I do not think it is possible here on Earth."

Amanda, knowing there was something involved in this illness that she could not understand unless she persisted, prodded the stone-faced, reticent alien healer.

"What kind of cure?"

Ordinarily, Sootran would have pinned this impudent woman to the wall with a well deserved glare. But he sensed that she was sincerely interested in Sarek's welfare and deserved to know the reason for his unprecedented collapse.

"Ambassador Sarek is in the death throes of 'Pon Farr', Madame." Sootran felt his dignity slip disastrously, aware that he was about to commit an almost unpardonable breach of protocol. How could he explain to this high strung human female the seriousness of Sarek's losing battle with life? How could she possibly help...?

Bluntly, Sootran described Sarek's malady in detail, declaring the ambassador's death to be inevitable. Emphasizing the Vulcan penchant for privacy, the elderly healer predicted Sarek's confinement would conclude in less than three days and

his body would then be returned to Vulcan for the rites of burial.

Amanda had remained silent throughout his recital and Sootran was secretly relieved she hadn't erupted into further emotional display. He had to admire Dr. Grayson, she had reminded him slightly of his wife, T'Pey--stoic in the face of incredible disclosures, calm to all outward appearance, yet seething inside with questions and impatience. Perhaps she would be suitable after all...

Amanda resumed pacing quietly as she digested Sootran's devastating revelation. He stood watching her, wringing his hands with uncharacteristic nervousness; and several minutes of embarrassment passed before she turned to him thoughtfully, regarding his reluctance to face her with amusement.

"You explained the Vulcan mating process very clearly, Dr. Sootran--"

"Just...Sootran, Madame."

"Yes. But you indicated that only bonded partners could survive the ordeal which, you've said, lasts anywhere from three days to a week?"

//Good heavens, don't they eat...or anything else? Do they sleep, too...

besides ... ?//

"The pair is bonded when very young, Dr. Grayson," Sootran added almost apologetically. "It is a very old Vulcan custom performed at the age of seven to form a mind link to span the galaxy. Then, when the time comes, they are properly matched to endure the mental and physical strain of the Pon Farr." He opened his mouth to say more, but Amanda waved him silent.

"But you said Sarek isn't bonded." She peered at him uncertainly, wondering

if there were additional complications that hadn't been disclosed.

"He lost his bondmate many years ago, before the onset of his first cycle. The tragic incident affected him adversely and he would accept no other afterwards. We tried to persuade him against such folly but he had been deeply influenced by the loss and later it was surmised that he had lost the capability of ever experiencing the fever. That is why this was so--unexpected!"

He stared at the double doors to Sarek's bedroom for a long moment before

continuing in a more kindly tone.

"Ancient records indicate very few unbonded unions as being successful. There is something about the...chemistry not being precisely accurate, and unbonded males are always cautioned that death usually results from such an untenable circumstance."

"But if the chemistry were right...?"

Amanda had expressed the thought out loud, eyes narrowing with her own conclusions. Sootran's eyebrows lifted suspiciously and he stepped towards her

knowingly.

"Madame --"

"I must go in there, Sootran. Sarek is dying. Since I am the only available female," she gestured at the empty couches and chairs around them, "I am the only choice. And you stated that Vulcan and Human reproductive systems are very similar, only that the cycles differ."

"Madame," Sootran repeated harshly, "What you are suggesting is probably very dangerous, and most certainly very doubtful. You are not of Vulcan extraction and

you cannot imagine the perils involved!"

"Nevertheless, there *is* a chemistry between Sarek and me, Sootran. I felt it this afternoon, and again this evening as we argued near the fountain. There is more than just mutual respect for each other."

Sootran sighed heavily and turned away in apparent exasperation.

"Dr. Grayson, I am familiar with Terran 'romantic' beliefs and I assure you that Vulcan males are incapable of such foolishness."

"Well, you'd better do another treatise on 'human foolishness', Sootran," Amanda flared indignantly, "because I am going in there, and I am going to do whatever Sarek requires of me to restore him to his former health!"

She turned and walked purposefully towards the bedroom door but Sootran reached

it first to fling an arm across the opening, barring her way.

"I must remind you, Madame, that Sarek is in a very precarious condition.

Your intrusion may render him beyond help. I really don't advise--"

"Get out of my way, Sootran," Amanda gritted through her teeth. "You and I both know that only I can help him because none of your medications have worked. And I intend to offer all I have to give that man back his life!"

The stand-off was short lived and Sootran slumped in resignation to move aside and push open the door into Sarek's sleeping room. Amanda slid through the entrance hesitently, her courage suddenly flagging at the enormity of her decision. But she glimpsed the elegant head rolling on disheveled pillows and heard a low moan of pain; and gasping in dismay, she hurried to the bed.

Sinking down onto her knees, she stared at him in consternation and grabbed

one twitching hand in her own to raise it to her face.

"Oh, Sarek, you mustn't die...I couldn't bear it! I want to help you... please let me help..." She wasn't sure he'd heard because she'd spoken the words so softly, and her eyes were blurring with moisture. He lay on top of the covers still fully clothed as they had left him just half an hour before, and she leaned over him unhappily to loosen his high collar. She couldn't resist smoothing the unruly hair, and smiled wistfully as it insisted on curling around her fingers.

He seemed to sense her presence and she felt his fingers clench her hand, the sensation sending a prickling of fire up through her arm into her shoulder. Sarek's lips parted in silent query, and a second later he opened glazed eyes to focus on

her face.

"Amanda," he whispered hoarsely, horror filling his eyes, "you must leave here...at once! It is not...safe for you here! Please go..."

"NO, Sarek. I will not leave until you've recovered! Sootran has told me

all about your -- "

"You...must...go, Amanda!" He pleaded with her sternly, his hands groping wildly to push her away from the bed. But she easily resisted his weakened attempts and held his hands tightly to quiet him. When she heard the Vulcan healer approaching she frowned at the intrusion; but Sootran ignored her indignation, addressing Sarek in matter-of-fact tones.

"Dr. Grayson has evinced willingness to assist you, Ambassador. With your permission I will instruct her as to the proper procedure. May I begin?"

Sarek groaned loudly, turning away from them in painful misery, and Sootran shrugged impatiently.

"He is almost beyond communication, Dr. Grayson. If he is to be helped it must be immediately. Will you trust me to instruct you in the preliminary steps?"

Amanda nodded numbly, her fear lessening in light of Sarek's rapidly deteriorating condition. Sootran grasped both of Sarek's hands and pressed them against her temples, motioning her to hold them there with her own, and he turned Sarek's face back towards her, holding it firmly despite Sarek's struggles to escape.

"Concentrate, Madame, on the ambassador's eyelids and repeat after me the

words: 'my mind to yours, your body to mine, combined spirits forever.'"

Tremulously, Amanda did as she'd been told and instantly noticed a gentle warmth radiating from Sarek's hands down through her neck into her breasts.

"Keep repeating the words, Dr. Grayson, until he responds," Sootran cautioned tersely. "He must hear you and believe you or contact will not be attained." And

he backed away towards the exit, quietly.

She repeated the words twice again and was faintly relieved to see Sarek's eyes opening slowly in astonishment. She smiled at him encouragingly and recited the formula again, and was rewarded to see him smile back. The warmth had spread throughout her body and it left a blissfully serene compassion where there'd formerly been suffocating panic. She closed her eyes momentarily when a sudden dizziness intervened, and she swayed precariously.

But Sarek held her securely and the spell passed to be replaced by a growing desire to touch his face. He nodded as though she'd spoken, and her fingers reached out eagerly to caress the warm, dry complexion that seemed to glow again

with health.

"Oh, Sarek," she breathed languidly, "I have never felt like this before... I believe I'm in love with you..." And leaning down with his hands still cupping her head, she kissed him gently.

As she continued caressing him softly with her lips he stared at her

quizzically.

"What are you doing, Amanda?"

At first she was puzzled; then realized that he was not familiar with the

human custom of kissing and proceded to coach him artfully...

The flame slowly spread until Amanda had relaxed against the length of him on the bed. Sarek's arms slipped down to enfold her closely, his eyes glistening with a secretive light. She sighed peacefully and snuggled into his enveloping warmth.

Thoughts of an affair long ago in her youth interrupted Amanda's concentration, and for a moment she imagined herself to be back in that sweet, sunny meadow, with the sound of bees in the clover. It had been exquisitely tender, her first real love, and she'd cried for weeks when it was over. But now the same sensitivity was returning...the strength of male arms reinforcing the passion...and her mind reeled with the sensual delirium stimulated by his insistent embrace...as though he wanted her to forget...

Sometime later they surfaced for air, and sighing impatiently, Sarek reached to release several strategically placed feminine fasteners. As he fumbled clumsily

with the strange catches, Amanda smiled teasingly and coyly assisted him.

But his face twisted cruelly and he gasped in agony as pain coursed through him with merciless concussions. Amanda struggled in alarm to prevent his rolling off the bed.

"What is it, Sarek!"

"The...compulsion is returning. Your presence temporarily disturbed the process, but now I must...prepare you for what is to come." He faced her grimly, his eyes dark points of flame, and she shrank back timidly. He shook his head sorrowfully at her fright.

"I can no longer...control the impulses, Amanda. They...demand that I comply

with..." And he arched his back in torment as Amanda watched speechlessly.

"It is...time. You must get undressed--quickly!" The spasm passed and he glanced at her in dismay, his need patently urgent in the way he squeezed her hands.

"Forgive me...Amanda. I do not wish to hurt you."

Her eyes were wide with anxiety as she tore frantically at her clothing to fling it on the floor. He turned away from her, physical desire coursing through him uncontrolled as he struggled to disrobe. Amanda pulled back the bed covers and stared at him in pity before ripping free his tunic and trousers, and with an herculean effort, yanked off his boots.

The boots had barely hit the floor before he was calling her, his voice

choking with attempts to suppress the deadly force of his lust.

"Amanda, please...I need..."

Without hesitating she was there, her body instinctively seeking to comfort him, his ragged sobs diminishing into groans of pleasure as he met her willing invitation. She tried to relax and move with him, stroking his back with the comforting softness of her hands; but his hunger was brutal, his concentration almost excluding her from the intimacy of their union.

At last his frenzied movements abated and she felt him lift his head to

regard her tenderly, his fever temporarily appeased.

"Amanda, we must join minds again—it will make it easier the next time, and the after effects will be less painful for you." And without waiting for her permission, he positioned his hands on her temples and began chanting the words. She felt a curious floating sensation, then relaxed into a warm brightness that she realized was Sarek's unexpressed love. Joyfully she responded, pulling his lips down to meet hers, and was instantly delighted with his rumble of contentment.

Joined in mind and body they traveled the summit together and in spent wonder,

explored each other's rapture.

//It was incredibly satisfying, My Wife.// Sarek soothed, his fingertips tracing her lips gently.

//Am I now considered your wife, Sarek?// She felt the tendrils of his smile in her consciousness.

//There is a brief ceremony which follows several days after the fact. It is designed for unusual situations--such as we have experienced.//

//Do you mind if we have a Terran ceremony, too, My Husband?//

//Whatever you desire, Amanda. I will comply with whatever you wish from now on.//

//Is that a promise?//

//I meant anything within reason, of course, My Wife ... //

//I'd like that in writing ... //

There were many whispered rumors among the servants the next morning about the developments during the wee hours of the previous night. Dr. Peter Jensen, president of the college and a good friend of Dr. Grayson's was seen entering Ambassador Sarek's quarters, and left a short while later with a smile on his face. The Vulcan healer who had accompanied Sarek on this memorable trip to Earth had cleared everyone from the immediate vicinity of the ambassador's apartment, and had posted a guard outside the entrance. The return trip to Vulcan had been cancelled for the entire Vulcan party "until further notice", with an official statement that the ambassador was ill and, with deep regrets, would be unable to complete the remainder of his itinerary.

And Dr. Grayson was neither seen nor heard from for several days. Furthermore, it was brazenly gossiped that Dr. Jensen had performed a marriage ceremony

between the Vulcan ambassador and Dr. Grayson!

There were many more circulated observations and suppositions which Dr.



Jensen neither denied nor confirmed; but it was a well known fact that repeated attempts by the news media to question Sootran or enter the ambassador's private rooms were met with well shielded explanations and persistent security measures. When it was finally announced that the ambassador was well enough to return to his home, it was coupled with the astonishing statement that Dr. Grayson would be accompanying him as his wife! It was further explained that Dr. Grayson had decided to live on her husband's planet to teach at the Vulcan Academy in an attempt to cement Vulcan/Earth friendship as well as to continue her research while living and working closely with the Vulcans.

There was much speculation as to how long this new association would last, and about the durability of a marriage between two races thought previously to be incompatable physically as well as mentally. But speculation turned to amazed congratulations when word was received a year later that the ambassador and his

wife had become the parents of a healthy hybrid son named Spock.

Epilogue

Although it will never be known for sure, speculation has it that when Ambassador Sarek and Dr. Grayson met in her classroom that fateful afternoon it was love at first sight although neither was aware of it at the time. It was surmised that Dr. Grayson's fascination for alien study was, of course, a contributing factor, but it was also pointed out that the ambassador had expressed a "certain interest" in the human female as well--even before meeting her in person.

It was generally agreed that both were scientists and had an intensely inquiring mind about each other's worlds, and it was also determined that the coupling had a decidedly beneficial effect on the relationship between their respective governments. We cannot document the actual thoughts that led to the ultimate decision to marry, although it is suspected that Sarek's collapse made an indelible impression on Dr. Grayson, probably instigating a non-reversable process in their association.

And Sarek's later comment that "it seemed the logical thing to do" was merely a public explanation for what was later imagined to be an absolute preoccupation with each other. It was never determined that the marriage had anything to so with Sarek's recovery--certain facts of the union were never really known as Amanda and Sarek chose to keep them to themselves.





"Hey, Granny, are you here?" The slam and clatter of the screen door accompanied the ten-year-old's energetic blur of bare feet and

rolled-up jeans.

"Granny? Where are you? I found me a baby possum down by the creek. He must have fallen off riding on his mammy's back." Eyes the color of a Georgia summer sky peered about the cool darkness of the old house.

"Granny, I think he's gonna be okay, but what do you feed a possum? Can I use the rabbit food? Granny?" Small hands left a smudge as he pushed thick locks of auburn hair away from his sweat-

damp forehead.

Moving through the darkened room, he called out again. "Granny, the sun's goin' down. How come you don't have no lights on?" Reaching

the doorway to the single bedroom, he spotted a form on the bed.

"Boy, are you gettin' lazy, takin' a nap this late in the day." Shaking the figure, he recoiled at the coldness of the arm he had touched.

"Ed, I'm worried about the boy. Finding Granny's body like that and all, he's just not actin' normal."

"Now, now, honey. He'll get over it, once the funeral's done

and things get back the way they were before."

"But they won't, don't you see? He spent so much of his time with her, draggin' home every bird with a broken wing and helpin' her with the stock. Granny was our healer, and there's nobody here to replace her."

"You're just frettin' too much -- school starts up again soon,

and that'll keep his mind occupied; always does."

"Lenny, there was nothing you or anyone else could have done to help Granny. She was 104, and her heart just decided it was time to stop.

"I don't believe that, Ma. If there'd a been a doctor close by, he coulda helped her. An' when I grow up, that's what I'm gonna do. Fixin' people ain't much different from fixin' hurt critters, and I've been doin' that long as I can 'member. Just you wait and see."

Tears flowed down the freckled cheeks as he spoke, standing stiffly in his Sunday suit to watch the coffin as it was lowered into

the ground. "Just you wait."



The golden-red hair of the young woman glowed even more redly in the late afternoon sun of the desert planet. With a sigh, she shut down the computer console and stretched. It was almost time for her small son to be home from his day at Early Lessons and he was sure to be ravenously hungry and overflowing with news--related ever so orderly and logically--of his day. She smiled. Tiny Vulcan/Human boys could be so preciously proper at times while also being completely full of the excitement of childhood. She often regretted that part of him that, even now at four, held himself aloof from her touch. It wasn't his fault, she knew. It was something she must accept as natural -- the more he became aware of his ability to feel her emotions when he touched her, the more he withdrew physically to learn the full extent of where he left off, and she began. Still, she missed touching him, missed the soft baby folds of skin at his neck, the tiny, pale green fingers that had so often found her fingers when he was one or two. With a shake of her head she dismissed the thought and reactivated the computer to receive the afternoon mail.

A small, soft-shoed toe hit the stone, spinning it across the packed dirt to smack into the big wooden gate with a satisfying crack. Slightly more than two and three-quarters of a foot higher, dark eyes sparkled beneath a glossy fringe of ebony hair and a small mouth struggled not to smile. It had been a good day--in fact, as his mother would have said, a "great" day. All his lessons had been completed before the end of the lesson time; the Master, in some lapse of thought --or some unusual streak of benevolence--had assigned no exercises to be completed at home; it was not his day to bring food for the pet anahag and he had no pail to return home. The sky was clear, the air dry and warm, the sun big and scarlet as it lowered, still far from the horizon, and his hands were empty. He stretched on tiptoe to unlatch the gate and then pushed it open with both hands and more than a little effort. His stomach growled abominably.

When the small boy entered his home he was immediately aware that something was wrong. There was sobbing coming from the library! Panic seized him as he recognized his mother's voice, and he ran to the

room, skidding on a throw rug on the slick marble floor. "Mother?" The woman looked up, surprised and wiping at her eyes. "Spock. I'm sorry...I--" She dissolved into tears again for a few seconds, but was able to get a few breaths and calm herself enough to speak. "Do you remember I told you about--Ruggles?" Her voice cracked at the

"Yes, Mother. He is your pet on Earth, like I-Chaya is my pet

Only it's a...a dog."

She took another breath. "Y-Yes. He lives--lived with your grandmother Laura." She held out a message read-out from the computer. "He died."

The small, dark head hung down. "I grieve with thee, Mother." A ragged gasp took her before she could answer. "He was a very old dog, Spock. He lived a very full and happy life." She paused as the large dark eyes found hers. "It's just so hard. I loved him so much. And I keep remembering how much he wanted to come with me when I left Earth--and how he couldn't understand...why...why he couldn't qo."

She put her face into her hands and began to weep again. "I'm sorry, Spock," she muffled. "I know it's hard for you when I get all emotional. I'll be alright. I just need to cry for a minute." Her

face was still buried in her hands as she sobbed softly.

The small figure stood for a long moment staring at the bent head of his mother. His face showed a gamut of half-hidden emotions and thoughts. At last he sighed and took a step forward, putting his small arms around her. "Don't cry, Mother. You have me, and Father. And I-Chaya sometimes likes you best of all."

His mother looked up and crushed him to her for a long moment and then, with a fresh flood of tears and -- it was confusing -- a big smile, she held him at a distance and said with a red-eyed, laughing face, "I-Chaya likes me best because I feed him!" She squeezed him hard, but released him quickly. "Which reminds me-- what does your nose say I baked today?"

The small nose sniffed. He'd missed it in all of the excitement. "Brownies!" She turned her face away a little as she stood up and steered him into the kitchen; he still couldn't quite not smile when he smelled brownies. She sniffed and took a deep breath. She needed

to blow her nose.

**





Deus

ex

Machina

by Emily C. Ross

The clear, dry air above the desert wilder-ness called Vulcan's forge rippled and shimmered in

the rising heat of morning. Nocturnal wildlife had vanished into deep, dark dens some hours earlier, long before the first rays of this planet's fierce star had flashed over the horizon. Now, in the temperate brilliance of dawn, as again at twilight, was the natural time for diurnal creatures to be out and about their affairs. Among them this morning was the boy.

With studied purpose he went about the business of survival. Canteens-gourds strung on a vine-must be filled at the spring, held under the narrow, knee-high waterfall that sprang from the rocks to disappear into unknown depths, all within an arm's span. Food must be gathered-juicy red-purple blobes, to be packed in wet leaves and saved for noon-meal; fragile fungi, detected by a tangy aroma, to be dug from the soil before they spoil; fat white roots, to be stored in the cave against some future, less prosperous morning. He was seven years old, and this was his kahs-wan: his trial of manhood.

He had been fortunate in finding the cave that first day, though he had been searching among likely strata for just such a combination of soft, porous rock between more durable layers at just the right angle for wind erosion. Judging by the stale residue of spoor, this rude shelter was not otherwise occupied this season, though it had obviously in the past served as temporary quarters for such small animals as firefox or wolverine. The entrance was far too small for le-matya.

Water he had located by the simple expedient of following game trails. Nothing was more rare, more precious, more vital to the ecology of the entire area than this tiny trickle: it was to the

spring that all trails led.

The trail back from the spring to the cave was rugged and, for one burdened with the weight of water-gourds, wearisome. The boy had stopped to rest, setting his precious load down carefully in the shadow of a boulder. A faint scuffling and a shrill squeak, barely

28

within his hearing range, drew his attention. Silently, he crept toward the edge of the high trail; drawn by a curiosity as basic to his nature as the need for food or shelter, he peered over the steep cut into the ravine below.

A slivat had cornered an uncooperative rikitek. A Terran might have called them badger and mouse. The predator did indeed resemble a badger, differing mostly in the flame-and-russett shadings of its thick fur. The prey, though it filled a mouse's ecological slot, was closer in appearance to a coney or, perhaps, a terrier puppy. The boy himself made no such comparisons. Well-versed as he was in the wildlife of his native world, formal studies in exobiology still lay ahead of him. In his mother's tales of horses and dragons and elves, the boundaries of fact and fantasy were never completely clear, clouding their informational value.

Confidently, the slivat circled its prey. The rikitek was somewhat the worse for wear, limping slightly and leaving dark stains on the sand. Still it pranced and chittered furiously, rolling its eyes and fluffing out its lion-colored fur in a brash attempt to appear formidable. The slivat, ready to conclude the farce, indolently reached out a clawed forepaw, only to snatch it back with an angry

snort. The rodent's sharp teeth had drawn blood.

The boy knew his own race had once been predatory omnivores, vicious creatures whose ferocity had not been gentled by the evolution of sentience. Vulcan's current pacifistic posture was due, he knew, to the force of will, not of nature. A predatory order was natural. To many, a successful hunt today meant a full belly tonight for the slivat, possibly survival until tomorrow for its helpless young. It lived by killing and could not, even should it so desire, choose otherwise; its carniverous digestive system could process nothing else.

The rikitek, born a prey animal, was also merely fulfilling its natural destiny. Illogical, therefore, that it should struggle so fiercely in the face of certain defeat. Illogical to refuse to accept what was surely a foregone conclusion. Totally illogical, that anyone could be so drawn toward a small, gallant creature merely because it would not, would not give up. Even as the thoughts were forming the boy's hand, seeming of its own volition, was fumbling,

seeking through the rubble at the cliff's edge.

The rock that landed on the slivat's back was much too small and light to do any damage. Startled by the unexpected touch, the beast darted an indignant glare around, behind--and the rikitek was gone. Neither hunter nor unseen observer had seen how or where. The frustrated predator snuffled in the dust for awhile, then gave up and waddled off, stolidly, to begin the task all over again.

The boy backed away from the cut, dissatisfied with his own partisanship. What was it about the small creature that had touched him so? Was not a calm acceptance of the inevitable a more admirable trait? Was not such violent resistance futile and inefficient, where defeat was sure?

Except, of course, that it hadn't been. The beast had struggled, had stalled, and tried--and a stone had fallen from the sky. Success

creates its own logic.

The boy picked up his water harness and settled it across his shoulders. Deliberately, he shunted the incident into the remote corner of his brain that was as near as he was able to come to forgetting, and proceeded on the rough and perilous path, intent upon the business of survival.

29



MISCHIEF

So far,
The years of his life span
No more than a decade,
Yet of imagination, quick wit,
And resourcefulness
This small human possesses
An abundance.
One day,

He will use these gifts to make Life-and-death choices, Deciding the fate of a planet, A galaxy, the universe itself.

He will be a natural for poker --a master of the bluff,

Buying enough time to squeeze out of a Tight situation, But for now,

His busy mind employs his talents toward one end: Mischief.

His eyes,
Large and hazel in a child-smooth face,
Grow bright with the fervor of youthful ideas.
One day,
Those eyes will assume the "look of eagles",
Silently commanding the loyalty of his crew.
Those same eyes will melt women's hearts with a glance,
Or brim with profound grief at the death of a comrade.
And even when the corners become creased by time, still
His eyes will twinkle gently in a half-teasing expression.
But for now,
Those eyes threaten to overflow with just one thing:

James T. Kirk! I'll have a word with you, young man!

Mischief.

-- Debbie Gilbert

MATURITY

The world was your playground.
Or so you believed,
In blissful childhood ignorance.
You never doubted that you would become
A starship captain.

After all, if you wanted it badly enough, It had to happen. Right?

And when the kids played "spaceship", You always demanded to be the captain (and you always got your way). But did you ever pause from your play Long enough to really look at the stars?

To wonder what they were, and why they were there?
To wonder who you were, and what your purpose was here?
Perhaps you did, but only for a moment
Before mundane attractions beckoned once again.

"Don't you ever wonder why You don't like to play games anymore? Why you don't see your friends The way you used to?"

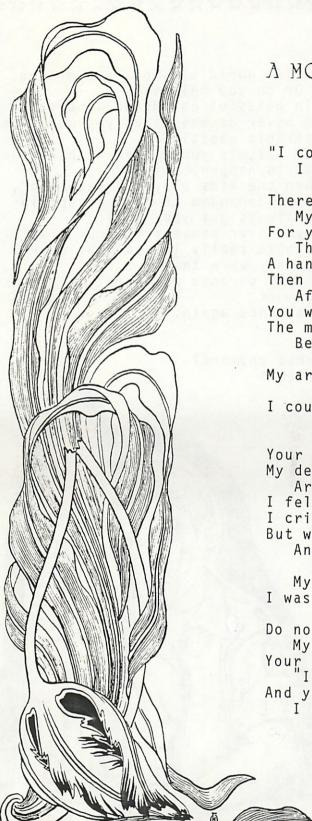
Suddenly the world is different, A place of infinite wonders. How could you have remained So long unaware of them? There's so much to learn. So much catching up to do, As you trade idle dreams For more concrete endeavors. Dreams, you've discovered, Do become reality --But not by magic; By strength of will. Only a select few Have what it takes, But you, son, Are among the chosen. You have the power to succeed. The time has come to abandon Childhood --To fulfill your "First, best destiny."

Aim high, James Kirk. The stars await you.

-- Debbie Gilbert







A MOTHER'S RESPONSE

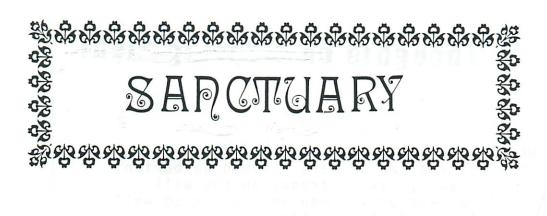
"I could never tell my mother I love her."

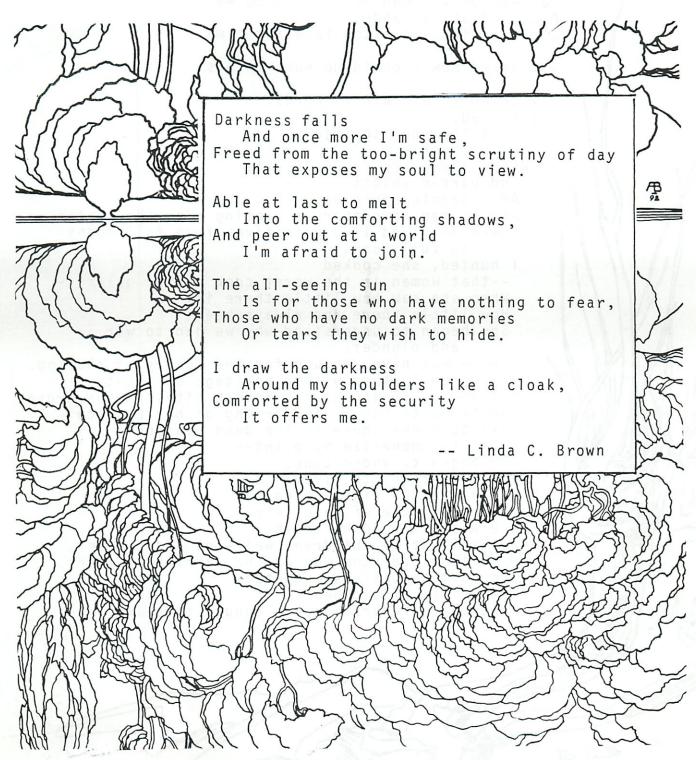
There was no need,
My son,
For you showed me in a
Thousand ways:
A hand extended,
Then drawn back,
Afraid
You would reveal too much;
The manner in which you walked
Beside me,
Close,
My arm sometimes touching
Your own;
I could feel it and
I knew.

Your eyes,
My dear,
Are pools of expression.
I felt their pain.
I cried when they could not.
But when I looked into them
And saw
Reflected there
My own love for you,
I was happy.

Do not sorrow,
My son.
Your father, too, never said
"I love you,"
And yet
I know.

-- Rowena Warner

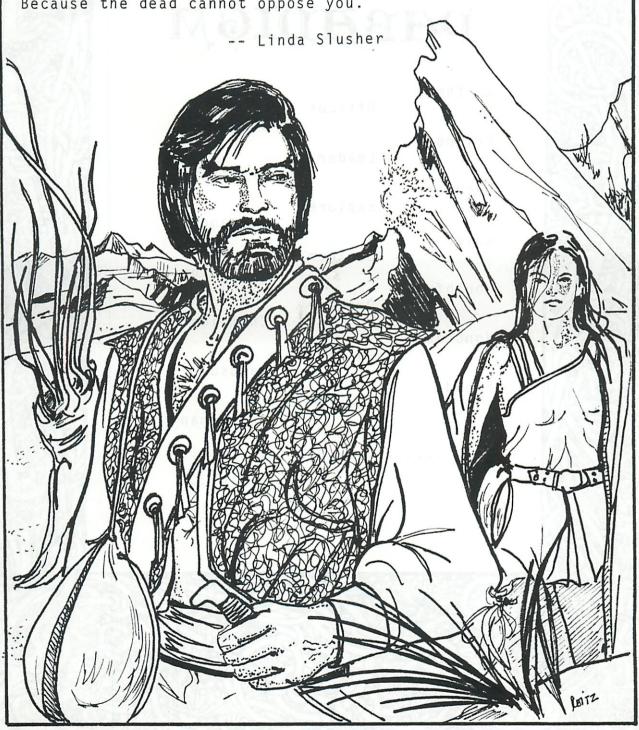


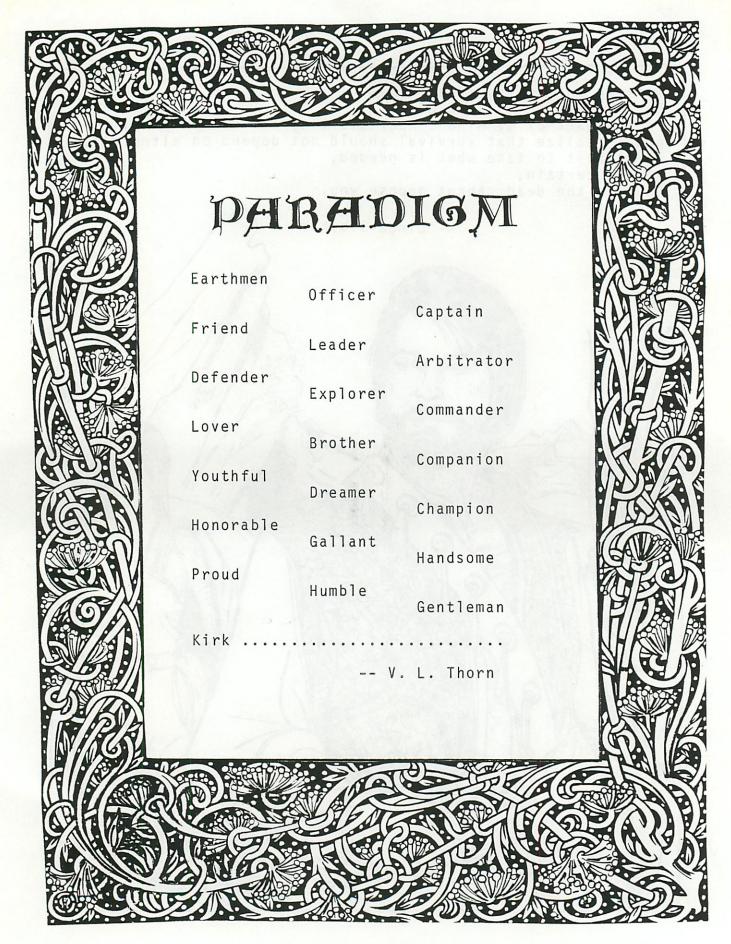


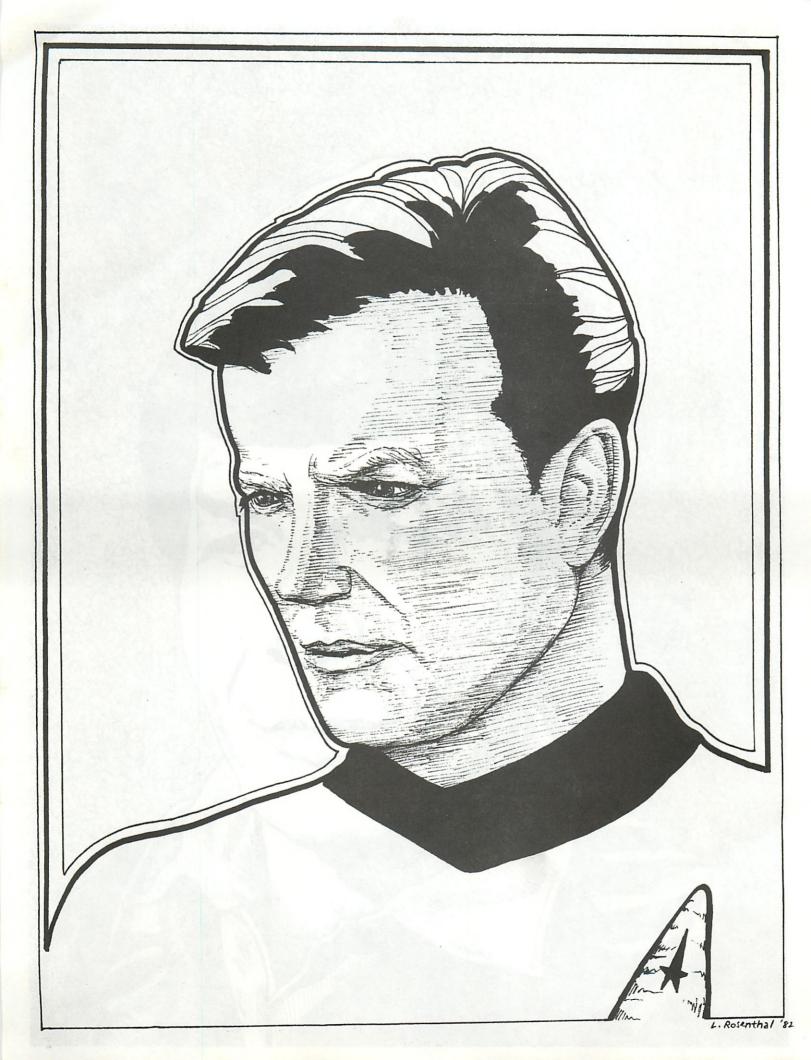
Thoughts on a Spring Night

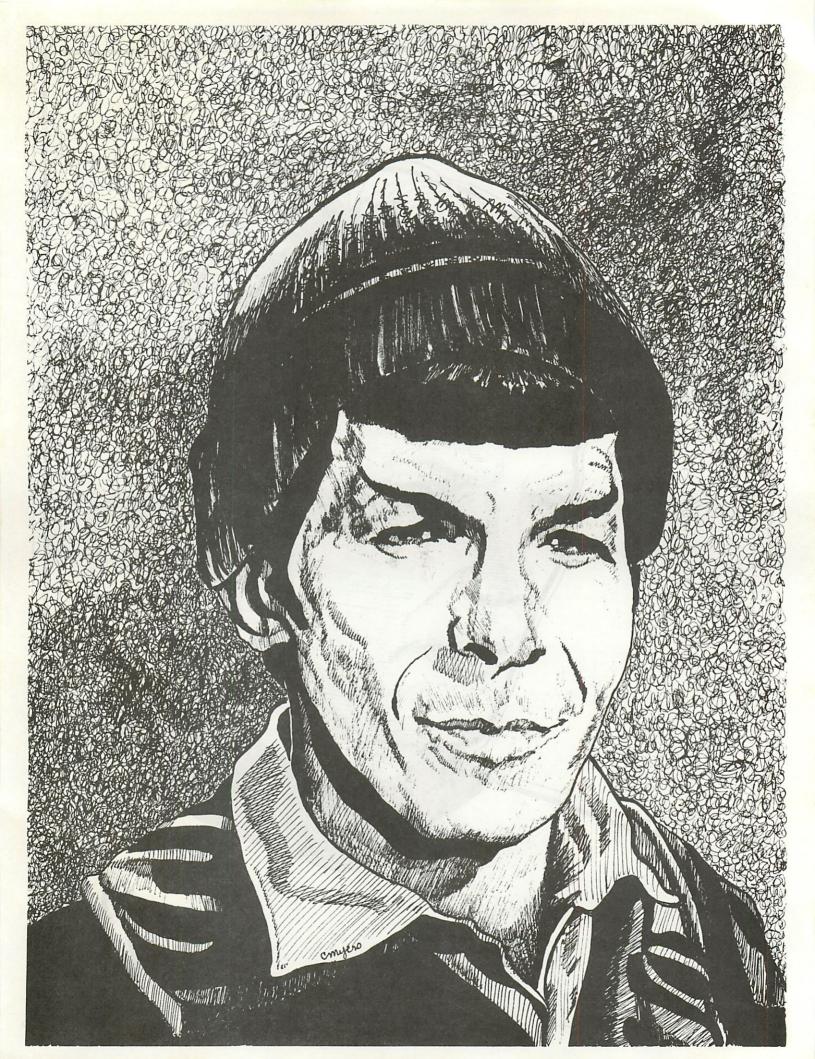
When I brought my consort home (she was a prize of war, a human barbarian) She saw my combat trophy on the wall (The head of the man who fought so well And died at my hands; The Organians were too late for him). She asked how I could do such things. I tried to explain in words. I failed. Then I took her to Inje, The homeworld, Where there are cruel deserts And barren veldts And steaming jungles And so many predators competing with the hunter. There we lived like primitives from full moons to full moons. I hunted, she cooked --that woman is the worst cook in the galaxy--When she saw how little there is, How little there had always been, She began to understand why we had to war and plunder. There was never enough for the luxury of sharing. She is an Earther with a heritage of plenty, But as she scratched her insect bites in the trush And tried to ignore the crying of her stomach. -- I took her there in the dead season to emphasize my point --She began to understand. We had to fight to live, So it had to be right to do so. We made a virtue of necessity. There was honor in hardness. Now I look at my children, well-fed and content, And still I feel the way of the warrior is right. My consort says it is outdated, That we can afford peace Because the Federation has enough to share. 34

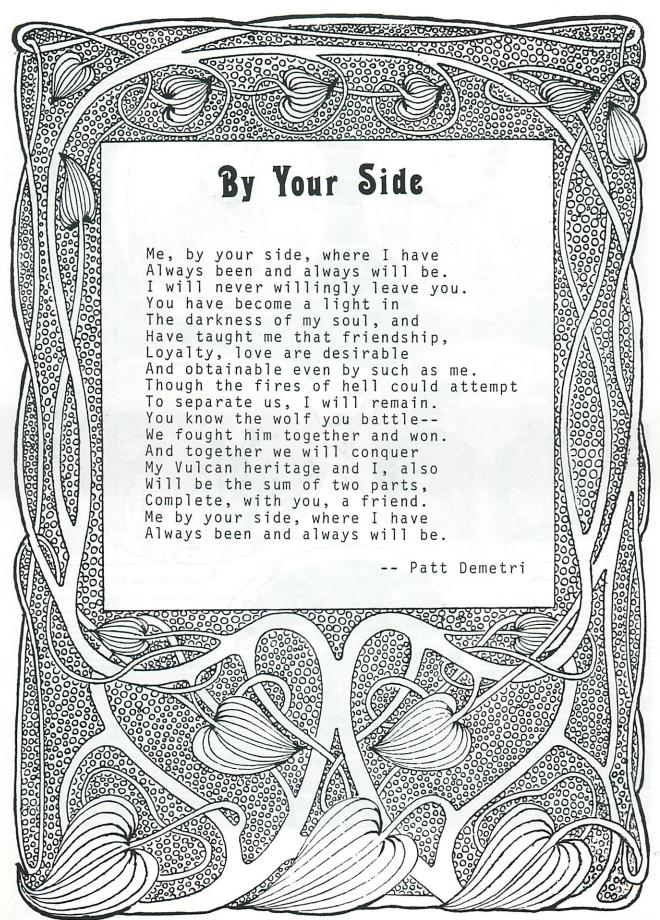
It's an intriguing idea,
But every time I think of it,
In the back of my mind I hear starving children crying,
And I realize that survival should not depend on altruists.
It is best to take what is needed,
And be certain,
Because the dead cannot oppose you.

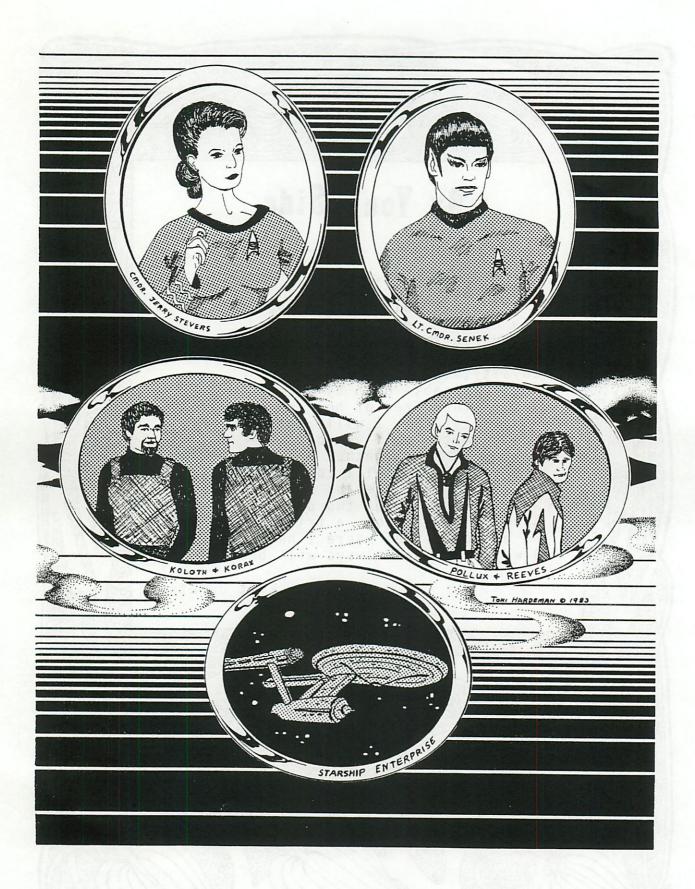














Captain Fred O'Neill aboard the freighter *Tern* was glad to be on his way home with his shipment of grain after nine months in the Gamma Sector. He was engaged in a race with their sister ship, the *Ibis*. Both long range freighters had followed the same route, sharing cargo and companionship; it was a friendly rivalry. Srinvas Patel, captain of the *Ibis*, had been his friend since boyhood.

O'Neill punched through a contact with the other ship. "Last one into port

buys all the grog for the first three days, Sri," he challenged.

"You know I prefer brandy, Fred, but I shall enjoy the free ride in any case,"

Srinvas said with a slight smirk.

"How is Tommy doing?" O'Neill asked, changing the subject to one closer to his heart. Tommy was his nephew, his sister's only son, who was in space largely at Fred's urging. It had taken three months of cajolling to convince Sis and her husband to let Tommy sign on as general crew to try his space legs.

"He is fine," Sri responded. "You know, I have never seen a crewhand so

uncomplaining, nor one who took to spacing so well on a maiden voyage."

"Yeah, I guess it runs in the family," Fred chuckled.

"He will be---" the transmission broke up in a hail of static. O'Neill frowned slightly and bent over the board in an attempt to reestablish contact, but nothing succeeded.

He had his navigator scan for the *Ibis*, fearing some malfunction had caused the ship to falter. A puzzled frown on the navigator's face gave way to alarm. "Sir, I can't locate any sign of the *Ibis*. I have tried all energy-matter bands and--nothing."

Fred leaped out of his command chair, pushing the navigator roughly from his station to check the instrumentation himself. Nothing. It was as if the Ibis

had never existed.

Over the subspace channel broadcast to the cold, uncaring vastness of space came a half strangled cry that was almost human.

"TOMMY----!"

II

Ship's Log. Stardate 7136.3: We are now in orbit over Starbase III awaiting the arrival of our passenger. We will depart for Eta Canaris IV as per orders as soon as Commodore Harker is aboard.

The orders were quite routine, a milk run really, thought James T. Kirk, captain of the Starship <code>Enterprise</code>, as he snapped off the log recorder. They were to pick up Commodore Anseln Harker at Starbase III, transport him to Eta Canaris IV for the signing of the Federation alliance with the Bitura of the Etians and then deliver Harker to Starbase VI in one week's time. It was far less exciting than investigating the disappearance of Federation shipping, which he had hoped to be their next assignment.

Kirk joined the rest of his senior officers, already in the Transporter Room

awaiting Harker.

"You may beam Commodore Harker aboard, Ensign Sibari," Kirk said to the freshfaced young woman behind the transporter console. They must have lowered the age for StarFleet service if that girl is an ensign, he mused, or I must be getting old. Impossible—starship captains don't get old.

"Yes, sir! Transporting now."

In the transporter chamber the column of fire began its flickering buildup, steadied, then solidified into a rigidly erect figure in Star Fleet uniform. Commodore Harker was tall and spare, as if his years of service had melted away any fat of soft living; the planes and furrows of his face were as harsh and rugged as a wind-blasted landscape and his steel grey hair was cropped close. But his eyes were his most arresting feature, pale blue-grey, set deeply under tufted brows. They surveyed the *Enterprise* crew standing at attention in the room.

The ensign at the transporter console was untried, unsure, but looked steady. She glanced down under the pressure of his gaze; surely she was too young for Star Fleet service.

There was Commander Montgomery Scott, a good man, not merely devoted to duty, but totally immersed in his engines and the *Enterprise* as a whole. Lieutenant Chekov stood at attention, very military, very correct, barely a hint of the brooding blood of his ancestors. Dr. Leonard McCoy, close personal friend of Kirk's the humanist with quick emotional reactions, an unorthodox yet disciplined scientist and medical officer, did not waver under inspection.

Kirk was no surprise, confidently returning the commodore's scrutinizing gaze. A good man, decisive, but with a reputation for action a shade too

independent, he decided.

Then there was the Vulcan, Spock, at Kirk's right, an appropriate position. Harker held his gaze on Spock somewhat longer. This was a loyal friend, a logical scientist, and a man who would not be turned aside from his goal. Spock returned his gaze without disrespect, but with as much intensity as Harker's own. The dark eyes were alive with curiosity and self assuredness.

Harker knew them all without being introduced, as he made it his business to know the command staff of any ship in which he traveled. His mission could depend on that knowledge, and he was not one to slight any detail in performance of his duty.

"Welcome aboard, Commodore," Kirk said with his most winning smile, and proceded to introduce his officers while Harker nodded curtly at each introduction.

"Let's not waste any more time, Captain. It is unnecessary for me to have met these people and a waste of their time to be here. I trust you will be more efficient in the future," Harker snapped at the end of the introductions.

Kirk recovered, reddening slightly, but said only, "Lieutenant Chekov will see you to your quarters. If there is anything you require, please let me know."

"I reguire that we get under way without further delay," was Harker's parting volley as he marched out of the room with Chekov.

As the door swished quietly closed behind the commodore, McCoy let out a whistle.

"I think I'll have to locate some brass polish for the next week--or tension headache remedies, at the very least."

"Come on, Bones, it can't be all that bad. Besides, Harker could put a little snap in the crew," Kirk countered.

"And the command staff. Phew! I hope he stays healthy, otherwise he'll be helping 'improve efficiency' in my area."

"Ach now, I heard the commodore came up from engineering. Any man who knows

a ship inside out canna be all bad," Scott interceded.

"Well, Mr. Spock, what are your observations?" queried the captain turning to his first officer.

"Commodore Harker's voyage with us should prove interesting. If he could improve the efficiency of the medical section then he would inteed have performed a valuable service," Spock remarked dryly.

"Spock, it would please you no end if the only two efficient operatives Harker found on this ship were the computer and you, and I am not sure there is

much, if any difference," McCoy retorted.

"Why, thank you, Doctor. It will, however, be a pleasure to work with some-

one else who does value efficiency."

Kirk grinned. As usual, the byplay of the running feud between his two friends had broken the tension of the last few minutes. "To quote our renowned guest, let's not waste any more time," Kirk cut in. "Scotty, could you manage warp five?"

"Aye, Captain."

"Then let's go mind the store," said Kirk, leading the officers out of the transporter room.

Harker mercifully kept to his cabin during the two day journey to Eta Canaris IV. When he did sorte' out for meals or courtesy tours the crew scuttled politely but rapidly out of his way as his reputation had preceded him. Spock took on most of the duty of conducting the tours and the commodore appeared to have no complaint about the management of the ship or his guide.

Ship's Log. Stardate 7138.7: The two day's voyage from Starbase III to Eta Canaris IV have passed uneventfully. We are approaching the fourth planet, Etar, the only inhabited class M planet in a system of five planets. The Etians, though spacefaring, have retained a barbaric feudal culture for five millenia. While they have not chosen an aggressive attitude toward their stellar neighbors, they do maintain a tradition of personal combat and chivalry. The landing party will include myself, Commodore Harker, Mr. Spock, Dr. McCoy, and Security Chief Skovik. As the Etians respond favorably to showy apparel, dress uniforms are the issue of the day for the landing party.

The landing party materialized in a broad collumnade at coordinates supplied by the Etian High Command. Equipped with universal translaters, the *Enterprise*

men were able to greet the honor guard of aliens appropriately.

The palace made an overwhelming assault on the visual esthetics of the landing party. It was decorated in Grotesque gone wild and then painted in primary colors and gilded with gold, silver, and copper colored metallic substances. The Etians themselves were humanoid in appearance, stocky and muscular, of purple complexion with straight black hair cut in an even length just above the shoulder. The only obvious shape variance from the *Enterprise* crew was the extreme length of arm with fingertips brushing their knees and shortness of leg, giving them a simian appearance. The uniforms followed the garish color scheme and were studded and padded functionally, thinly disguised as decorative fashion. Each guard was armed with a dagger and short sword in addition to a very lethal looking laser gun. Dueling was an art form in this culture as well as a way of settling an argument.

The landing party arranged itself with Kirk and the commodore in the lead, then McCoy and Spock, followed by Skovik, the Security Chief who rivaled the Etians in muscular build. At 1.9 meters he truly stood out in the crowd, but warm brown eyes and a mobile face belied the expected coldness of his profession.

The march terminated before an immense gold door enamelled with hunt scenes. The lead guard swung open the portal on a scene which could have been taken from the Arabian Nights. Low tables spread with hot and cold dishes, fruit and ices were scattered along the periphery of the hall and surrounded by large brocade cushions among which many of the room's occupants lounged. In the center of the grand hall were musicians and dancing girls in gossamer garb, jugglers, trained

animals of alien conformation and acrobats performing their skills simultaneously.

The Tibura was obvious not only from her position on a raised dais but also from the surrounding horde of Sychophants and petitioners clamoring: for her attention. She waved all away when she sighted the Enterprise men and indicated places at the table on the dias for them. With formal greetings they settled themselves on the cushions. Harker to the Tibura's left and Kirk to her right. The woman's appearance and manner left no room for question as to who was in charge. Although small in stature, she gave the appearance of physical strength. Beyond middle age with greying hair, her face exuded character in firm lines and angles. Unlike her subjects, she dressed simply in a black tunic and trousers-here black was the royal color and only the Tibura was allowed to wear black

Harker raised his cup in a toast: "To the coming alliance between the Etians

and the Federation. May each enrich the glory of the other."

"I cannot sip from this cup yet," responded the Tibura in a silken whisper. "Before any alliance, any compromise can be concluded, there must be a challenge

and combat. Our champion against yours, to the death."

She snapped her fingers and a quard from the background stepped into the central court. Instantly the entertainers gathered their props and withdrew to the sidelines. The Etian champion was a gargantuan specimen, not so much in height, but in breadth of shoulder and muscle mass.

The officers exchanged stunned looks, but were experienced enough not to react. The Tibura registered the fact with a grim smile of satisfaction.

"If our champion should lose, would the alliance be cancelled?" the commodore asked, voicing his main concern.

"I did not say that; only that the alliance must come from challenge and

combat. Who will be your champion?"

Harker looked over the Federation officers and finally pointed to the man at Kirk's side. "Commander Spock."

Spock's eyebrows rose sharply. "I regret that I must decline," he said softly.

Kirk suddenly felt as though all sound had died except the hissing of his own blood. The other men at the table had gone pale and no one seemed to be breathing.

"That is an order, mister," Harker snapped.

"I am aware of that. I regret that my code as a Vulcan prohibiting the unnecessary taking of life prevents me from obeying that order. I cannot kill a sentient being for the sake of ceremony."

"Then consider yourself relieved of duty and under arrest," Harker spat, livid at the apparent cowardice shown before the Tibura. "And get out of my sight."

"Would confinement to quarters be sufficient?" Spock asked tonelessly, removing the communicator from his belt.

"Yes, beam up at once."

As Spock was taken in the transporter beam, Kirk felt the room spinning; this was impossible. Even Skovik seemed weak with shock. Harker turned to the ruler.

"That one's disobedience will be punished?" she queried. "Yes, madam. I apologize profusely for his bad manners."

"We would have executed him immediately."

"He will be punished under Federation law."

"Now who will be your champion?"

Harker pointed to Chief Skovik. "He will be the one. What weapons?" "It is unarmed combat so that neither side has advantage," she responded.

The Etian removed his body armor and weapons. Removing his tunic Skovik stepped down into what had become an arena, confident of his advantage but with misgivings about carrying it to the death.

"Begin!" the Tibura commanded.

The antagonists circled each other warily. Skovik suspected the Etian would



be a bone crushing wrestler, not one accustomed to the unarmed combat techniques of space Karate. Suddenly the Etian charged, arms open to immobilize him in a bear hug. Skovik kicked out in a jolting blow to the solar plexis and danced away from the temporarily paralyzed arms. The crowd roared in appreciation. The other grunted in surprised pain and reacted enough to grab a retreating arm. Swinging quickly around, Skovik chopped with an iron hand at the restraining arm, again in the stomach and at the side of his opponent's neck. The alien dropped to his knees and released Skovik's arm but managed to catch one of the chief's ankles, counterbalancing the security man and causing him to topple on his back. Using his opponent's grip as an anchor, he lashed out with his boot heel and caught the Etian full force in the jaw. The Etian's head snapped back with an audible crack and it was over. Skovik sat up and stared dumbly at his crumpled adversary.

"I didn't mean to kill him," he mumbled.

"Well done," the Tibura shouted, applauding. The rest of the Etians joined in the applause, adding loud cheers as their champion was carried off.

"At least there is skill in your Federation to counter disobedience," she

remarked pointedly to Harker.

The rest of the banquet and the signing of the treaty was a blur to Kirk's numbed mind. Even McCoy was subdued. It seemed an eternity before they beamed back to the *Enterprise*.

III

Harker wasted no time in calling for the immediate court martial of Commander Spock—the trial was set for the following day. When the objection was raised that such a trial required three officers of command rank, Harker quoted a little used regulation that stated an officer of command rank senior in length of service and of the same rank as the defendant could serve on the court martial board. There was such an officer on the *Enterprise*: Scott. Over his strenuous personal objection the chief engineer was ordered to serve, as was the captain of the *Enterprise*.

Spock remained in his cabin maintaining only minimal contact with other ship personnel. He had waived the right to counsel, and had refused Kirk's request for a delay in order to provide a lawyer for his defense. However, when McCoy discovered that no witnesses had been summoned in Spock's behalf he stormed into Spock's quarters and summarily announced that he, Leonard McCoy, would be counsel for the defense. Spock did not refuse but only stated mildly, "Logically there is no defense, which you well know, since you were there; prepare what you will." McCoy retreated in silent confusion, speechless for once, in the face of Spock's fatalism. Only Vulcan ears could have heard the murmured, "Thank you, Bones," as he left the cabin.

Everyone on the ship was deeply concerned. Spock was not a popular officer in the traditional sense—he was too much of a perfectionist and too sparing of his praise, but he got things done and had earned the crew's grudging respect. His creative thinking and decisive action had saved the ship on more than one occasion, and the captain, and individual crew members. They all knew that a beloved first officer would not necessarily be a better one. The impending court martial was having a visibly demoralizing effect on the senior officers. Scott and McCoy had temporarily left their duty stations to study Star Fleet law for loopholes, Scott with his scotch and McCoy with some vintage Saurian brandy. Even Kirk seemed in a fog, reacting autonomically to the details of running the Enterprise.

Lieutenant Uhura, the black woman who often won Spock's praise for her competence while on duty at the communications console, found herself continually glancing at the science station and developing a hard knot in her throat. Nurse

Chapel, whose affection for the first officer was known to all but not acknowledged, found reasons to walk the corridor past Spock's quarters at least four times before the trial and usually wound up hurrying to her own cabin blinded by silent tears. Many other shipboard females shared her sentiment. It was not a happy ship; laughter was muted if it did not die aborning under the accusing stares of the crew.

The court martial was set for 1400 hours in the briefing room. The participants arranged themselves around the oval table and on chairs against the wall. Harker, Kirk and Scott took their places at one end of the table, McCoy at the opposite end with a place for Spock. A chair was set equidistant from both parties for witnesses. Spock was escorted in by Security Chief Skovik to take his place, and the trial began.

"Computer on," Harker ordered.

"Recording," the console responded in its neutral feminine voice.

"Stardate 7137.58. The procedings of the court martial of Commander Spock of Vulcan herewith recorded as per Starfleet regulation 7692 G, Sections 17 through 32. The panel officers are Captain James T. Kirk, Commander Montgomery Scott and Commodore Anseln Harker presiding. Commander Scott is impaneled by right of seniority. Acting as defense counsel is Lieutenant Commander Leonard McCoy, Ship's Surgeon."

"The specifications of the charges brought against Commander Spock are that he did willfully and knowingly disobey a direct order of his superior officer in a sensitive diplomatic situation thereby endangering the signing of the treaty with the Tibura of Eta Canaris IV. How does the defendent plead?" Harker stared

stonily at Spock.

"Guilty--"

"Wait a minute!" McCoy cut in. "My client pleads 'No contest'."

"At least," McCoy whispered to Spock, "let's see what the options are before throwing your career away."

"Very well, Doctor," Spock acceded, "I will play out this charade."

"The court accepts the plea of 'no contest'."

Harker called the first witness for the prosecution, Chief Skovik, who reluctantly related the incidents on Eta Canaris IV. As he had presented the literal truth McCoy saw no reason for cross examination. Kirk and Scott kept silent. The next witness Harker called for the prosecution was a shock to all.

"Doctor Leonard McCoy, take the stand."

"I protest, this is highly irregular," McCoy stormed.

"Irregular, yes; illegal, no," Harker countered. "I can order you to take the stand."

"Never mind," McCoy acceded as he took the witness chair.

"Do you swear to the testimony you are about to give is the whole truth and nothing but the truth?"

"I do."

"State your name and rank for the court."

"Lieutenant Commander Leonard McCoy, Chief Medical Officer on the Enterprise."

"You heard the testimony of Chief Skovik."

"I did."

"Did he present an accurate description of the events?"

"As far as he went, yes."

"What do you mean 'as far as he went'?" Kirk cut in. Harker threw him a chilling glance.

"There is more to a career than an isolated event. The order shouldn't have been given in the first place," McCoy responded.

"My actions and orders are not on trial here," snapped Harker.

"Why do you maintain the order should not have been given?" Kirk continued

pursuing McCoy's argument.

"May I remind you that you are on the court martial panel and not the defense counsel, Kirk!" Harker fumed.

"On the other hand we need the 'whole truth,'" the captain shot back.

"Proceed, Bones."

"Spock is a Vulcan and you all know Vulcans eschew violence. Spock will--can only fight a defensive battle or to save some one else's life. He has done it for me. To order him against his ethical code to fight a battle to the death is unreasonable. He is incapable of doing so."

"Then he is a poor excuse for a Starfleet officer," Harker said baldly.

"On the contrary, he is the best first officer in the Fleet. He has never before disobeyed a lawful Starfleet order from anyone..."

"I protest," Spock broke in. "That is an untrue statement, Doctor, as you are well aware."

"Spock, what are you doing?" McCoy choked.

"Helping you tell the truth," said Spock blandly.

"And what is the truth?" queried Harker. "Have you ever willfully disobeyed a Starfleet order?"

"Yes, I knowingly forced the *Enterprise* to break the quarantine of Talos IV," he responded.

"But that was to give some kind of life to Chris Pike!" McCoy objected.

"I also relieved Commodore Matt Decker of command against his direct order."
"He wasn't working with a full deck!" McCoy cried. "You have never disobeyed

Captain Kirk."

"On the contrary, I left sickbay against his order to obtain life samples on Deneva."

"Damn it, Spock, I'm trying to help you! What the hell are you trying to do?" McCoy raged.

"Prevent you from destroying your own career by committing perjury," he

rejoined calmly.

For several moments no one spoke. Scott was pale as a ghost and Kirk was ashen. Finally Harker turned to McCoy.

"Is Spock relating true incidents?"

"Yes," McCoy whispered.

"Speak up, for the record," demanded Harker.

"Yes, damn it. But not for personal gain, only to help others, to save the ship, to save a world."

"He nevertheless seems to obey orders only when convenient and thus he is a very poor excuse for the Starfleet officer, as I said before," Harker pointed out.

McCoy turned a look of dawning comprehension to Spock and responded, "When order overrules compassion in an organization, even Starfleet, I am not sure we are a service."

"I only did what was logical," said Spock, his voice emotionless. But he looked to McCoy in acknowledgement and gratitude.

Harker broke the mood harshly. "Gentlemen, I think we have heard enough. Even the defendent confirms his tendency to disobedience. Mr. Scott, how do you find the defendent?"

"I dinna want to say it, laddie," Scotty addressed Spock. "By the paper law you are guilty, but by reason you are right. Aye, I am sorry."

"I understand, Mr. Scott. You have no alternative," Spock said.

"I vote 'guilty'; Kirk, your vote?" demanded Harker.

James Kirk shivered and his palms were wet. He felt the chill breath of an open grave, glad it wasn't his and hating himself for feeling that way. He was torn; he could not even look at Spock.

"Jim," Spock said softly, "the Enterprise needs you and you need her."

"But I need you as my first officer." Then Kirk did look at Spock, and found forgiveness in his expression. Did he see the gratitude written on Kirk's face? "You can, you must go on without me," Spock insisted gently. Kirk turned to Harker and breathed, "Guilty."

IV

James T. Kirk slumped in his command chair. The events of the past week had raced by at warp speed, beginning with the pick up of Commodore Harker and now...

The intercom beeped for his attention. Ensign Liu reported, "Your presence

is required in the transporter room, Captain."

"Thank you, Ensign," Kirk replied dully, rising with effort. This is insane, it must be a dream--not real, he thought as he made his way to the turbolift.

The door slid back to reveal Dr. McCoy looking, if possible, even more haggard than Kirk. The captain entered silently, aware of McCoy's scrutiny.

"Transporter room." The lift sped noiselessly on its way.

"Jim, you can't do this--you know it's wrong; Harker is wrong. There has got to be something we can do." McCoy's voice was wrought with anger and despair.

"Doctor, we have been through all of this," Kirk said painfully. "It's been

done by the book--"

"The book be damned! Harker is a martinet and you know it," McCoy raged. "Spock did what was logical and---"

"--disobeyed a direct order. Even he admits that."

"But Jim..."

"Bones, help me. Right now I must do the hardest thing of my career. We'll

find a way, a loophole--change regulations if need be."

The look on Kirk's face belied his words. McCoy had never seen him look so hopeless, as if part of him had died on Eta IV two days ago. Harker had wasted no time after the court martial in pronouncing and executing the sentence. Spock was to be dishonorably discharged from the service and left on the first inhabited Federation planet encountered on their voyage. In this case it was the primitive planet of Outworld. Sympathetically he rested a hand on Kirk's shoulder, as much to draw his own support for the difficult hour ahead.

When they reached the transporter room Spock was already there, but so was Commodore Harker. Spock's belongings had been packed into one pitifully small crate already placed on the transporter disk--not much to show for a "distinguished" career in Starfleet. Spock was still in uniform so that the last "ceremony" could be completed. His face was composed as he stood before the transporter alcove.

Harker remarked tightly, "So you've finally decided to put in an appearance,

Captain."

Kirk's stomach knotted, as did his fists. Did this man have no redeeming qualities? How on earth did he ever become a line officer, a leader?

"I came as soon as Ensign Liu called," he retorted.

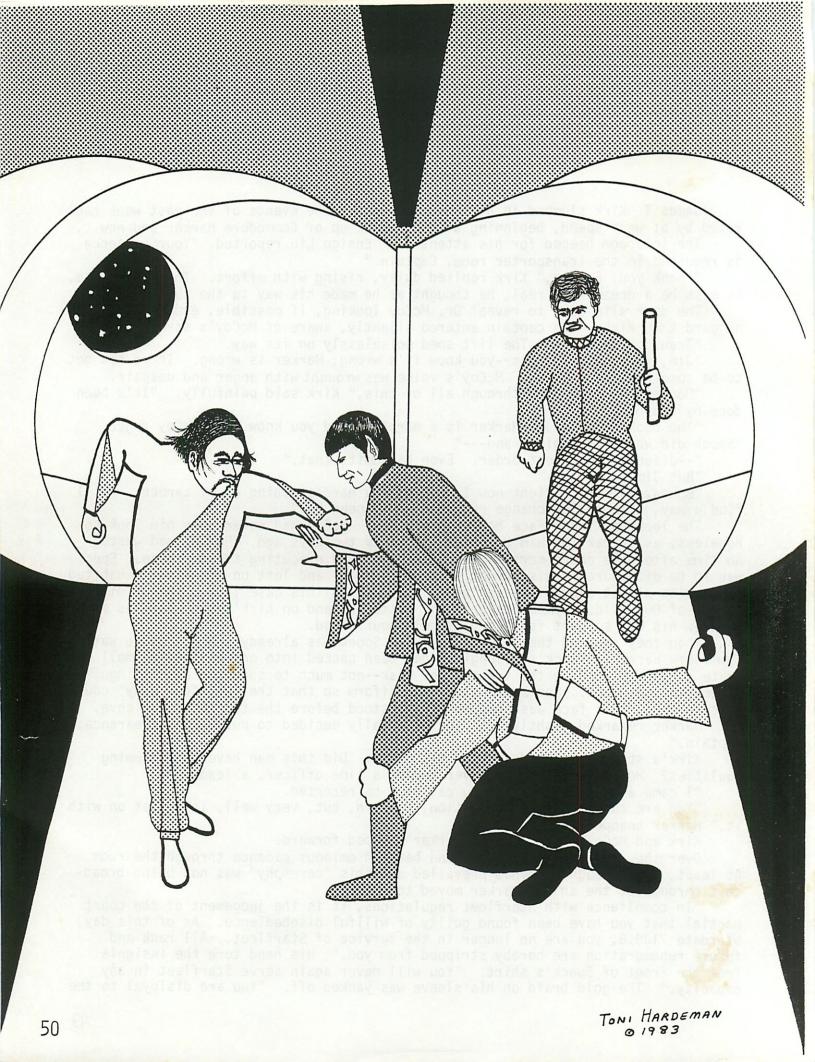
"You are courting insubordination, Captain, but, very well, let's get on with it," Harker snapped.

Kirk and McCoy faced Spock. Harker stepped forward.

Over the intercom the taped sound beat an ominous cadence through the room. At least, Kirk thought, he had prevailed and this "ceremony" was not being broad-

cast throughout the ship. Harker moved to Spock.

"In compliance with Starfleet regulations, it is the judgement of the court martial that you have been found guilty of willful disobedience. As of this day, stardate 7138.8, you are no longer in the service of Starfleet. All rank and future renumeration are hereby stripped from you." His hand tore the insignia from the front of Spock's shirt. "You will never again serve Starfleet in any capacity." The gold braid on his sleeve was yanked off. "You are disloyal to the



service and lawful authority and are hereby banished from any Federation service vessel. You will beam down to Outworld with a dishonorable discharge."

Spock, his face impassive, mounted the step to the alcove. His insignia lay

in a tattered little pile where Harker had dropped them.

"Spock, are you sure you don't want me to beam down with you?"

"To what purpose, Captain?" Spock responded gently. "Let us make a clean end of this."

"But Spock--"

"Captain Kirk, may I remind you that I am due at Starbase VI on stardate 7140," Harker broke in. "If we delay any longer we will strain the ship's capabilities to get me there on time, which is a potential waste of Starfleet resources. Mr. Spock has received exactly the consideration he deserves."

"Jim, Leonard, live long and prosper," Spock said, solemnly giving the Vulcan

salute.

"Energize," Harker barked. Ensign Liu jumped to obey the order.

"Good luck, Spock," McCoy murmured to the fading transporter sparkle. *I always* seem to be late in saying that, he thought with a lump in his throat. He glanced at Kirk and read agony and anger in the set features. *Damn Harker*, he thought, and not for the first time.

"Well, Captain, I assume we will be warping out immediately. If you need me I shall be in my quarters," Harker said as he strode briskly out of the transporter room.

"Yes, sir," Kirk responded tonelessly.

V

The reception area for Outworld's only space port was mercifully empty. The last hour had been difficult enough and Spock was not sure he could face questions or even curious looks at this point. He quickly shouldered into a short loose, flowing black Vulcan jacket covering the telltale damage to his service tunic.

It suddenly struck him that while he had thoroughly prepared himself for his exit from the *Enterprise* and had mastered the pain of parting from Jim and McCoy, he had given little consideration to the matter of survival here on this alien, barely civilized world. Where to stay, food—was a vegetarian diet even possible here?—a means of continued support, were suddenly very immediate problems.

Spock sighed softly, picked up his belongings and set out to find his fortune.

The hallway Spock chose because of its exit markings was dimly lit, as it was now night on Outworld. He slowed slightly as his sensitive ears detected faint sounds of respiration. Turning a corner he saw two rough looking figures walking toward him. One was obviously from a heavy gravity world and though humanoid in appearance was muscled far beyond need for this planet. The other was not even humanoid. His hirsute features reminded Spock of holos of grizzly bears. Only the red eyes, carry belts and four fingered hands spoke of something other than brute animal.

Spock set his belongings down and nudged them with his foot to the side of the hall out of the way. He did not see the brawny man with the length of pipe

who stepped from a dark doorway behind him.

"What do you intend?" was all Spock got to call to the approaching thugs before the pipe crashed down on the back of his skull. Spock staggered forward two steps and again the trailing thug swung the pipe. Night descended.

Spock shifted slightly and nearly mouned. He was sure further movement would split his head apart like a cracked egg. He opened his eyes slightly and regretted that, too, when light stabbed like knives into his brain. He was surprised to feel

cloth under his fingers rather than the hard metal flooring of the port hallway.

"Easy does it, Bucko," boomed a nearby contralto voice. "You'll live, but

you'll live happier if you take it easy right now."

Spock was only too glad to comply. He did decide to try vision again and was rewarded with only a mild hammering in his skull and a view of his surroundings. He was in a small, sparsely furnished room, the most remarkable aspect of the room being its other occupant. The woman was nearly two meters tall and built like a Valkyrrie, her braided and coiled straw colored hair adding to that impression. Her face was too strong to be beautiful but the upturn of her wide mouth and twinkling blue eyes gave it an attractive warmth. She was dressed in a long blue smock and wore tied on sandals.

"That's better. My name is Maggie. Who be you?" the Valkyrrie continued.

"Spock," he responded in a hoarse croak. "Where am I?"

"You be in Maggie's bed, which not many men can boast of in Outworld," she answered. "Lucky you were that those brigands didn't split your skull. As it was the port guard found no identification or money among your things. They be simple thieves, I be thinking."

Spock was not sure whether she was talking about the thugs or port guards,

nor whether that was intentional.

"May I see what was left?" he queried.

"Sure. Here it be at the foot of the bed." Maggie hefted his belongings on the bed within his reach. Spock rapidly searched the carryall and discovered indeed money and I.D. were all that seemed to be missing. Even his Vulcan lyre was intact. He quickly stowed his gear with particular reverence for the instrument.

"You play?" Maggie asked noting his special handling of the lyre.

"Yes."

"Can't abide Vulcan singing myself, but that harp was made for angels." Maggie paused, "Don't suppose you be wanting a job."

"It seems it will be difficult now to survive without one."

"What do you do?"

"I had thought to obtain employment on a space ship of some kind." Maggie guffawed, to Spock's discomfiture.

"I am qualified in computers and engineering," Spock added quickly.

"I don't doubt it," Maggie smiled as if dealing with a simple child. "But, Bucko, this be Outworld. The last space ship was a star ship that left yesterday." Her eyes narrowed speculatively. "Won't be another ship for a month or more. You be from the star ship then. Crew or passage?"

Spock paused, not realizing that an answer would be so painful in formulating. To speak the truth boldly or bend it somewhat, what would be right for this human?

Deciding to take a chance, Spock declared, "Crew."

Before he could explain further Maggie waved her hand. She had noted his blue shirt and the lack of insignia in her ministrations. "You be here now. I

don't need whys."

Spock was now doubly indebted to this outgoing, self-assured woman. He wondered indeed if some kind of repayment were needed or whether she was a "Good Samaritan". It might even be her job. Since he could do nothing at this point, he decided to seek respite from his throbbing head in sleep, his eyelids becoming too heavy to keep open much longer. The last he heard was Maggie telling him softly, "You be right, Bucko, rest now."

Spock drifted slowly, grudgingly back to the realm of consciousness. His head still ached, but the pain could be put aside. There were a whole new set of computations to be determined now from what he had learned from Maggie. Without cash and immediate prospect of shipboard employment, what could he do on this

primitive world? Since life existed before he came in a self-sustaining mode, he could reasonably assume that any of his high technology skills would be at worst superfluous and at best redundant. And with his injury he could not expect to do heavy labor for a while.

He could always draw on his accumulated savings, but that would necessitate an expensive deep space call which he could not pay for in the first place. Also, he could not expect tachyon transmission on Outworld—in the length of time required for a response by conventional relay even a Vulcan could starve. If there were a Federation bank here there would be no problem, but Spock knew there was no branch bank from his preliminary scanning of the *Enterprise* tapes on Outworld. Even the question of a roof over his head was at issue since he could not stay with Maggie when he was up and about continue to accept her charity. Frontier mores tended to be unpredictable and conservative.

Just then he heard a key turn in the door to his left. Maggie opened it softly and Spock perceived that the door opened to the outside and that it was now night. Outworld ran a twenty-six hour day, thus he had been on the planet

some multiple of twenty-six hours.

"I am not asleep," he informed her.

"Good," she responded turning on the light. "I be hoping to talk to you, Bucko, and get some work done."

Pressing a button set in the wall, Maggie revealed that the wall concealed

a kitchenette behind sliding panels.

"We don't have synthesizers on Outworld, so I guess I be cook now," Maggie

explained. "What do you want to eat?"

He had not been aware of hunger until now--he must be getting better. "Whatever is available, as long as it is not an animal product."
"Done."

In a few minutes she handed him a steaming cup of broth, well flavored and hearty which he finished rapidly.

"What be your plans for looking after yourself?"

"You do get to the point swiftly."-

"And you don't?"

"Since there is no ship requiring a crew and I seem to have no money, I have no plans other than asking you for a suggestion as to how to proceed," Spock replied candidly. "How long have I been here?"

"This be your fourth day on Outworld."

Handing him his Vulcan lyre, she said, "Play something, but don't sing." "This doesn't...."

"Play!"

Spock trilled a few runs on the instrument and settled on a simple ballad. He became so absorbed in the interchange of melody and harmony that he almost forgot and nearly sang the refrain.

"You'll do. The proprietor of the Golden Unicorn be needing a musician to entertain the customers. It isn't much, but it'll tide you over until the next

freighter stops off, Bucko."

Spock considered his alternatives and asked, "When should I see the proprietor?" "Tomorrow. And I found a room for you, cheap, above the place. The Golden Unicorn be no swank place, nor your room, but it is work and bed."

"Thank you. What return would suffice?"

"Forget it, Bucko.MaybeI'll be needing your help some day."

VI

The days passed in melancholy progression. The entire crew of the *Enterprise*

seemed to be in mourning. Harker had arrived at his destination on schedule. Mercifully, Captain Kirk had not been called upon to attend his departure. He was afraid the temptation to scatter Harker's atoms over the universe would have been too strong. Fortunately, an administrative detail requiring immediate

attention had prevented his being present.

New orders from Starfleet sent the *Enterprise* to Star Base XII for crew replacements, thus cancelling their leave at Star Base VI. Kirk wondered at the urgency of crew replacements until he realized he was in need of a first officer. Lieutenant Commander Senek, a Vulcan from the science section had been moved into the position of science officer. At off-balance times Kirk would see Spock out of the corner of his eye and then he would remember. Psychologically, it may not have been wise to move Senek into the position, Bones had argued. Kirk countered that he could not damn a competent officer because he was a Vulcan and the captain was sensitive about Vulcans. In the end Senek took on the duties with the expected efficiency.

Ship's Log. Stardate 7149.5: We have proceeded to Star Base XII under Starfleet orders to pick up crew replacements. Admiral Comack has requested the presence of the senior officers at a formal reception in honor of Commander Jerry Stevers, who has been assigned as first officer aboard the Enterprise. Dr. Leonard McCoy, Commander Montgomery Scott and myself will beam down at 1600 hours.

Kirk switched off the log recorder in his cabin. The only strange thing about Stevers was that his dossier had not been immediately transmitted when Comack informed him of the assignment. Kirk shrugged his way into the dress tunic. He could not remember a Stevers at the Academy, but he could have arrived after Kirk left. He might even be a field commissioned officer, although that was highly unlikely. Comack had invited them to his office, before the formal reception, so perhaps more background could be obtained then. Kirk liked to know his officers well and especially his second in command. But Spock had been a friend. He shook himself out of the reverie, adjusted his dress uniform and left his cabin for the Transporter Room.

Scott and McCoy were already in the alcove when he entered. The beam down was accomplished perfunctorily and the trio made their way to Comack's office.

"Maybe Stevers will at least have a sense of humor," McCoy speculated.

"Maybe he's come up from Engineering," Scott said brightly.

"Gentlemen!" Kirk exploded. It seemed sacriligious to talk so, like dancing on Spock's grave.

"Come off it, Jim," McCoy retorted. "You need a first officer. Spock was

one of a kind, but at least let us accept what must be."

"Sorry, it still bothers me."

"We all miss Spock," Scott added sympathetically.

By this time they reached Comack's office and were ushered in by an officious clerk. Comack was not there yet so they settled in the free form chairs arrayed before the large desk. When Comack arrived they rose as one at attention. The Admiral was a big, genial looking man, rather like Santa Claus with a very short beard. Despite his white hair and laugh lines around his eyes, he was one of the best military minds in Starfleet.

"At ease, gentlemen," he said. "It is good to see protocol still survives on

the Enterprise. Jim, how are you? Commander Scott, Dr. McCoy?"

After a round of handshakes, when they had once again settled, he began.

"The loss of Commander Spock to the service was a blow politically to Vulcan-Federation relations and, of course, to the *Enterprise*." Admiral Comack raised his hands to ward off questions and the false hopes he saw raised in their faces. "It is irrevocable and Spock himself acknowledges the decision. If he

had not disobeyed a direct order, the outcome might have been different; but you were there."

They all nodded glumly.

"Commander Stevers has a unique history, including field promotion, and frankly I am grooming Stevers for command of a ship like the *Enterprise*. Stevers started out in Engineering..."

The Admiral paused, noticing the grin on Scott's face.

"...after completing university studies on Vulcan. The Commander has had the fortune to be at the right place at the right time and taken advantage of the opportunities. Gentlemen, may I present Commander Jerry Stevers." Comack stepped to the side door and ushered in the new first officer.

A minute of stunned silence was broken by Jerry Stevers' caustic comment: "Thank you, Admiral, for not betraying my sex; seeing the looks on these gentle-

men's faces makes the subterfuge worth it."

Not only was Stevers female, but she could turn heads among most humanoid races. She was very slim, almost boyish. Even though she wore her raven hair severely pulled back, her ivory complexion, striking features and expressive dark eyes set in a heart-shaped face worked together to create an unforgettable impression. She moved with a quick, catlike, easy grace.

Recovering quickly, Kirk responded, "Commander, I resent the implication of sexism. Would it be more reasonable to assume without other indications that all

new officers are female? What was the point?"

"I did not wish to be prejudged on my command abilities on the basis of my sex, nor receive favored treatment," she snapped, smarting from the justice of his retort.

"Madam, you are somewhat out of date. Women are first of all crew on the *Enterprise* and women only off duty," Kirk answered icily.

"Admiral, may I ask a frank question?" Kirk queried, shifting his attention.

"Yes."

"What did you hope to gain from this game?"

"Better officers." Stevers shot Admiral Comack a quick, questioning glance

but he remained unreadable.

The briefing for the next assignment proceded with dispatch. As Kirk had secretly hoped, they were being assigned to tracking down the mysterious disappearances of Federation vessels over the past several months. What was surprising was that the disappearances were not restricted to Federation shipping. Reports had come in from the Romulan Empire and the Klingons of similar occurences involving heavy cruisers. When Comack named the Romulan and Klingon commanders who were missing, Kirk was stunned. He knew them both as enemies to be respected. He and the Vulcan had bested her, but the odds of another doing so were infinitisimal. Commander Kor of the Klingons was ruthless, but as wily as they came. The whole complexion of the situation suddenly became very sinister.

Commander Stevers voiced Kirk's own growing conviction, "You suspect then,

Admiral, that this is some sort of invasion from outside our galaxy?"

"At the very least."

The orders were simple. As a starting point the *Enterprise* was to proceed to Hobar's World to interview a Captain Fred O'Neill. He had been witness to the latest disappearance and might be able to supply some overlooked clue that was not in the tapes of the formal inquiry and the relevant parts of the ship's log.

The reception for Jerry Stevers was anticlimatic, and everyone seemed intent on staying only the minimum time required for protocol before excusing themselves as a group. Comack's parting words were a clear warning: "No ship is immune to whatever power is at work. There is no apparent pattern, and you could be next. Be careful and good luck; I fear we'll need it."

The return to the *Enterprise* was subdued, all seeming distracted by their own private thoughts. Stevers left to gather her things together for transfer to the ship as the new first officer.

VII

The day dawned bright and clear for a world with a violet sky, wispy goldenyellow clouds just visible on the horizon. Spock awoke to find Maggie had left before him. She had taken to sleeping in a lounge chair which was unoccupied, and even the kitchen was open. He dressed quickly in a grey tunic over black slacks and carefully packed the remainder of his belongings. This morning he had only a slight headache which was easy to control with Vulcan techniques. After

a hurried breakfast he set out to explore his temporary home.

"Temporary" was a good description of the settlement on Outworld. Even though Spock was in the only spaceport on the planet there was only one street and an assortment of dwellings set behind the commercial buildings of Outworld. Maggie's place opened directly onto the main street—if a packed dirt thoroughfare rated the term "street"—at the far end, opposite the space port. Most of the buildings were of outmoded plastiform construction, sufficient since there were seldom strong winds. Spock knew the main commercial activities were some marginal mining of light ores and harvesting medicinal herbs. Although this planet had a temperate climate and abundant rainfall, the soil would not support federation food crops. Spock remembered something about a native fungus which rendered nutritive elements inert for most federation populations, and the silver blue savannahs of Outworld remained untouched by the plow. Even the grazers and carnivores of Outworld, while plentiful and varied, were useless for consumption because the fungus unbound the nutrients for them.

The space port was set in a broad valley and Spock could see the grasslands beyond the habitations. A sign caught his eye as he strolled down the street, proclaiming the building to be the "Owlfor Space Port Legal Services." At least the town had a name. There were few people in the street, most of whom were human in origin. The gravity of Outworld was .9 Earth normal so heavy worlders tended to bypass the planet and light worlders found too little to recommend the effort of adjustment. The human penchant for frontier worlds carried on here.

Spock located the Golden Unicorn three doors down from the port facility itself. The place was very much like a nineteenth Century earth saloon he had seen pictured in a history of his mother's planet. The owner apparently wanted to reinforce that image, for when he entered he found that the decor was almost impossible to tell from the authentic, even down to the long wooden bar and glass mirror behind the liquor bottles. Of course, no old fashioned saloon ever carried Saurian brandy, but they might have, had it been available. Nor would they have had an air curtain with the swinging half doors, but there was no sense in being slavish to period decor. The place was now deserted save for a middle-aged paunchy man polishing glassware behind the bar.

"Pardon me," Spock began, "I understand there is a position for a musician

available here."

"Maybe, who's askin'?"

"My name is Spock; I was referred here by Maggie."

"Okay, the boss is out back. Let me check." The bartender moved through a curtained doorway. Returning shortly he informed Spock, "The boss'll be here in a minute."

Nodding, Spock undertook an examination of the place in further detail. Apart from the antique bar there were non-descript chairs and tables arranged around the room. Opposite the entrance at the far end of the room there were

gaming tables: Roulette, dice, cards, and several nonhuman forms of gambling boards. McCoy would really enjoy this establishment, Spock mused. He wondered if he would ever see McCoy again. Abandoning that train of thought as unproductive and admittedly depressing, he turned to the curtained doorway when he noticed a figure emerging.

"This here's the boss," the bartender told him with a smirk.

Spock's right eyebrow shot up two centimeters for the boss was none other than--

"I see you found your way, Bucko," greeted Maggie.

"Are you sure if it's a musician you need--or a charity?" Spock asked, instantly regretting his uncharacteristic cynicism. He could not afford Vulcan pride at this juncture.

"Sorry I played you, Bucko," Maggie apologized quickly, sensing with dismay

his irritation. "Truly, we need music.'

She led him to a small clearing in the far corner of the room. There was a stool there and, Spock noted, commaflaged microphones strategically placed.

Against one wall was also a piano.

"The sets are timed for 7 to 8, 8:30 to 9:30 and 10 to 11 every night," Maggie explained. "We also have piped music. Don't need dance music since there ain't many women on Outworld. Folks won't listen to you much unless you're too loud, then they be nasty. You be welcome to the job until you ship out," she said earnestly.
"I accept," Spock replied stoically.

"Good, then. Let's look to your room," Maggie said smiling with her old self-assurance. She led Spock through the curtained door to a dark hallway and up a flight of stairs. The room smelled freshly painted and while spare, appeared to be clean. The furnishings consisted of a cot, table, chair and a compact cook-clean cabinet. The single window looked out on the savannah.

Spock deposited his things on the bed and turned to Maggie. "When do I

begin work?"

"Tonight."

"Very well," he responded, "and I believe 'thank you' is appropriate." "Okay, Bucko, I'll see you at seven," Maggie ended, but she delayed leaving

"Isthere anything else?" Spock queried.

"No--No never mind," she said absently. "Just let me know when you're ready to be grateful," she muttered as she exited the room.

Spock stared after her, both eyebrows on the rise.

Spock's performance proved uneventful and he settled into a routine. The patrons of the Golden Unicorn were not music lovers but they did not "boo" his playing. He even noticed a few regulars who started requesting special numbers. And so the sameness of the days drifted into weeks as he waited for a transport to take him off Outworld.

VIII

Kirk leaned back in his desk chair and locked his hands behind his head. had just finished reading Jerry Stevers' dossier and she had now risen several notches in his estimation. She had indeed been educated on Vulcan, in cybernetics and applied physics, specifically power systems. She had joined Starfleet as an Engineering Chief; her family had not permitted her to go to Starfleet Academy-they were factory employees and members of a pacifist organization. On the one hand they could not accept a high level career for a woman and on the other they could not condone a military career. During her two years in Engineering she

proved to have an almost magical touch with machinery. She first met resistance, then acceptance, finally respect. On one fateful voyage they ran into some Klingon renegades who were out to damage the Federation as much as possible before perishing in glorious battle. Her ship was primarily a scientific vessel with only light armament, and the first Klingon attack destroyed the bridge and all bridge personnel, including the engineering officer. She found herself in command of a full scale panic. Loading the survivors onto a long range shuttle, she coaxed the renegades near enough so that the explosion from the overloaded engine destroyed their vessel. She beamed out just in time in an environmental suit, but the shock waves caught her on the edge of the expanding debris. When they picked her up six hours later, radiation and a concussion had left her in critical condition. Her recovery and subsequent honors brought her to the notice of the Starfleet brass, followed by a crash officer training course and several intermediate assignments which had finally elevated her to the bridge of the *Enterprise*.

During the past two days she had proven a competent first officer. She had made no friends as yet and kept all the male crew at arms length with a completely frozen demeanor, yet she commanded her subordinates and treated all with unflagging courtesy. Kirk decided that she would no doubt eventually become a popular

officer, probably more so than Spock.

He got up and paced around his quarters. He always hated the inactivity of simply going from one place to another unopposed. If they proceded at Warp 4 they could be at Hobar's World tomorrow instead of three days hence. True, it was the upper limit of cruising speed, but who knew what a difference a day might make. Besides, there was some itch in the back of his mind he could not quite scratch.

Still debating with himself on the advisability of the change in speed, the captain showered and changed into a fresh uniform. He decided to stop off at the rec room for some coffee before proceeding to the bridge. Maybe by then the fuel expenditure would seem justified.

fuel expenditure would seem justified.

Enterprise Log, Stardate 7151.6: First Officer Stevers recording. We are two days on our voyage to Hobar's World from Star Base XII at warp 3. Ship and crew functioning normally. Endit.

Stever's hand hesitated before she hit the off switch for the log recorder on the command chair. She was in charge of the second watch while the captain was elsewhere doing whatever he did on his free time. They were still three days from Hobar's World, but there was something nagging at the back of her mind-something about the ship, about the "feel". This was ridiculous, she told herself. She had only been on a star ship twice before, as none of her other service had been on the Constellation class vessels. How could she know what the right "feel" was? Well, if she could not tell, there was someone else who could.

Returning to her regular station so as to attract less attention, she buzzed Engineering. Immediately Scott appeared on the viewscreen.

"Yes, Commander?" he queried.

"Scotty, I know this will sound silly, but how does the *Enterprise* 'feel' to you?"

"Weel, Lass, she is workin' perfectly, purrin' even, ye might say."
"Oh. Never mind, then," Jerry said, not realizing that Scott did not usually go Highland unless something was on his mind.

"Hold on there, lass," he cut in quickly. "I dinna say nothing could be wrong. My bairns are purrin' but I have done some checking myself."

"Do you think a computer comparison check is in order?"

"I wouldn't fault you for doing one."

"Thanks, Scotty," she said cutting the transmission. Hitting another switch she addressed the nerve center of the *Enterprise*.

"Computer."

"Computer on."

"Class one priority. Do a comparison check of all *Enterprise* parameters and functions with ship norm operation at warp 3."

"Commencing check."

"How long will the check take?"

"4.1 Standard time parts."

"Inform me of any operationally significant variations before that time."
"Recorded."

Stevers switched off the computer tie-in and surveyed the bridge. The rest of the bridge crew were engaged in their functions; only Uhura met her glance with a raise of her eyebrow. Stevers decided that her intuition was not enough to raise any alarm or even require an explanation, so she simply got up and returned to the command chair to carry on the rest of the watch.

Two hours before the end of the duty period Kirk put in his appearance. Stevers quickly relinquished the command chair and returned to her station.

"Navigator, if we went to warp 4, what time would we arrive at Hobar's World relative to Nathanville?" Kirk inquired.

Several minutes later Lieutenant Arrex responded: "We should arrive there mid-morning if we move to warp 4 now, sir."

"Thank you. Helm, inform Engineering of our planned change in speed,"

Kirk ordered crisply.

"Aye, sir," Lieutenant Tanner responded.

Just then Stevers' computer console bleeped for her attention. Reading the printout on the screen her eyes grew wide and the color drained from her cheeks. "Commence speed change," Kirk said.

"No! Wait!" Stevers yelled, swivelling swiftly toward the command arena. At that moment McCoy stepped out of the turbolift onto the bridge.

"Belay that speed change. What's the problem?" Kirk demanded quickly.

"The matter-antimatter mix will unbalance at warp 4! I don't know how the intermix formula was tampered with, but we'll shake apart above warp 3." Although her voice was controlled, she was visibly shaking.

"How do you know?"

"I ordered a computer comparison check, sir."

Kirk swung out of the command chair and went to Stevers' station to check the readout. After verifying the results he headed for the turbolift issuing orders as he went: "Lieutenant Uhura, take the com; Commander Stevers come to my quarters; Lieutenant Tanner, contact Engineering and inform them of the problem. Under no circumstances will you increase speed."

"Aye, sir," issued from three people simultaneously.

"Mind if I come along?" McCoy inquired.

Considering for a second, Jim said, "Okay, Bones, that might be a good idea."
They proceeded in complete silence to the captain's quarters. Stevers did
not know what to expect. She knew she had saved the ship from certain destruction,
but praise and thanks for her attention and quick action were not overwhelming her.

When the door slid shut behind them, Kirk turned to her with a look that

spoke cold fury.

"Madam, what was that all about?" he asked in a ragged whisper.

"What...." she stammered.

"If there is something wrong with my ship, I expect to be informed about it immediately!" he said, getting louder.

"But, sir, there was nothing definite to say."

"There was enough for you to order a computer comparison check."

"I didn't want to bother you with something I could not be sure of."

"I am the captain. It is your job to keep me informed of your decisions and

reasons. Consider yourself on report. Now return to the bridge."

"Yes, sir," Stevers answered as she headed for the door. Kirk had to give Stevers credit for standing up under his wrath. Although her eyes were suspiciously bright she had not broken down and had remained at attention. and all, it was his ship and his responsibility to be informed.

McCoy was leaning against a wall and eyeing him critically. "You know," he pointed out calmly, "Spock didn't always tell you at first blush of some of his

suspicions."

Jim turned toward him in annoyance, but could say nothing to counter the truth. "The Enterprise could have been destroyed.'

"You weren't supposed to be on the bridge yet."

"You think I was too rough on her?"

"She is a good officer, Jim. Give her a chance to prove it. If she doesn't have some responsibility or if she is too afraid to make a mistake, you'll tie her up in nonfunctional knots."

Kirk considered, "I know, Bones. You're right. Have I been that much of an

"Everything but the Fee, Fie, Fo, Fum."
Kirk grinned at McCoy. "Let's find out why we had the problem," Kirk said

as they left his cabin.

McCoy opted for returning to Sick Bay while the captain went on to Engineering. His first sight on entering the section was Scott wearing a puzzled frown while questioning a young ensign.

"One of the super cooled components appears to have been heated above tolerance. It's not the sort of problem that can be easily detected, especially since other components in the same module were not affected. I don't understand It was THE critical component," Ensign Yorba was explaining.

"You canna tell me no one touched that module since the last time was made

warp 4," Scott railed.

The ensign's dark coloring went several shades deeper. "No, sir, it is not something any of the maintenance or engineering crews would touch unless the telltales indicated a problem. I've checked the duty logs myself and no one has been near the module, much less the component."

"Has there been anyone in this section who would not have recorded their

activities on the duty log?" Kirk broke in.

"Well, only the Starfleet inspector, sir," Yorba admitted.

"Inspector?" Scott and Kirk said simultaneously exchanging startled glances.

"Yes, sirs. An Inspector Poulos came aboard at Starbase XII while you were at the base. He said he had to check out some equipment because of reported malfunctions in other starships. His credentials were in order--at least they looked legitimate," Yorba quavered.

"Did he come near the module?" asked Kirk.

"Yes, sir, I guess he did," Yorba said unhappily.

"It's all right, lass, there was no intruder alert and you did check

authorization," Scotty soothed.

"Well, we know what happened and how, but the answers raise more questions than we started with," Kirk observed. "I'll bet there is no Inspector Poulos on Starbase XII. But how did he get on board?"

"I dinna ken the biggest question: why?" Scott queried darkly.

"Yes, why indeed," the captain echoed. "I'll check out Inspector Poulos with Starfleet. For now, carry on. Has the malfunction been repaired?"

"Aye, sir," Scott and Yorba said in unison,

"It was Stevers who noticed the problem first," Scott yolunteered when Yorba had moved out of earshot.

"...and didn't tell me."

"Would Spock hae told you if he were na sure?"

"She isn't Spock."

"I dinna think you'd notice."
"She is so damn defensive."

"You don't make it easy for the lass."

"I just got the same lecture from Bones, but it may take several hearings to sink in. I'd best go mind--the store," Kirk concluded with a catch in his voice.

IX

The Enterprise settled into orbit above Hobar's World without further incident. The captain beamed down with Commander Stevers and Dr. McCoy to learn what he might from Fred O'Neill. It was a frustrating experience for all of them. O'Neill had retreated into a bottle and had only just begun resurfacing. No one could imagine any reason for the Ibis's disappearance nor any enemies made along the way. Fred and Srinvas held to a stringent ethical business code as part of the partnership agreement. The only person who might have borne any grudge against either of them was a crewman named Reeves who had been left behind on Lambda VI when Reeves, incompetent and paranoid, had physically attacked Srinvas for being "out to get him." Fred had pulled him off and dumped him planetside.

The family of Fred's nephew was unhelpful to the point of hostility, full of "I told you so's." Kirk suspected there was also a fundamentalist element to their distrust of space travel, but did not pursue that pointless inquiry. After two days, the *Enterprise* officers decided nothing more could be obtained from the

farming community.

On the slenderest thread of a lead, Kirk took the *Enterprise* to Lambda VI. This proved a dead end since crewman Reeves was nowhere to be found; even the port authority could claim no knowledge of his leaving although they vaguely remembered him as a whining, complaining man who had come in on the *Ibis*.

Several other disappearances were also investigated with similarly frustrating results including an Orian "privateer" and a Tellurian research vessel. It was

becoming an exercise in futility.

After their last stop Sulu pointed out that Outworld was a mere half day's journey from their present position, and since there was no urgent current lead

to be followed Kirk once again brought his ship to that planet.

Kirk and McCoy beamed down to the space port, where the only person on duty did not know anything about any Vulcan and Kirk suspected he would also be quickly "forgotten." Outworld was a good place for people to disappear if they wished to, and sometimes if they did not wish to. The station keeper did suggest the Golden Unicorn as a place where they might be able to pick up some useful information.

Together Kirk and McCoy entered the Golden Unicorn. The place was packed and smokey with the various exotic and mundane inhalants indulged in by the residents of Outworld. Kirk thought the whole population of the world had to be in this bar at this moment. They worked their way over to a surprisingly empty table and eased into the antique-looking wooden chairs.

"This looks like something out of the pages of an Old Earth history book,"

Kirk remarked.

"I wonder if they stage shoot outs for more realistic effect," McCoy quipped

dryly.

"What's your pleasure," intoned a contralto voice behind them. Both men, startled, swung around to gaze on a blond, blue-eyed Valkyrrie in a shimmering

violet caftan.

"Uh, well--Miss, I'll have a Saurian brandy," McCoy responded first.

"Make mine the same," Kirk added.

She nodded and left them, threading her way easily through the crowd. Their drinks were delivered equally efficiently. McCoy turned to Kirk to say something over the babble of voices and undercurrent of music when his mouth dropped open.

"Jim, look," McCoy gasped, pointing to the small stage. The crowd had parted sufficiently to give them a clear view of the musician: it was Spock. Just then he looked up from his instrument in their direction and spotted the two Starfleet officers. Sighing ever so slightly, he carefully put his lyre down, got up and made his way to them.

Kirk felt the blood rush to his face as he watched the Vulcan approach. Had

he come to this? "Spock, it is good to see you," he managed.

"The *Enterprise* isn't the same without you," McCoy began with false heartiness. Spock gazed at them analytically. "Gentlemen, you should not have come here," he pronounced.

"We had to be sure you were all right," Kirk confessed.

"And you have deduced that I am not."

"You have to admit that it isn't your style," McCoy cut in.

"I have an interim occupation until I can sign aboard a merchant vessal.

Foolish pride can get very hungry."

"Spock, come back with us. We'll go to Earth if need be and find some way to break the court martial," Kirk pleaded.

"You have some new argument, then?" Amusement touched the corners of Spock's mouth and lit his eyes.

"Dammit, Spock, you know Jim needs you," McCoy railed.

"Senek is not a good science officer?"

"Of course he is--how did you know Senek was science officer?"

"Logic. The first officer is incompetent?"

"She is doing very well, but even I miss you," McCoy confessed.

Spock arched an eyebrow at him, but did not rise to the bait. "It is illogical to continue this discussion. What is done cannot be undone without new evidence and there is none. Excuse me, gentlemen, but I would rather be missed than pitied." He began to rise.

"So you'll be too damn stubborn to accept our help," McCoy said bitterly.
"Correct, Doctor, although I do not admit the motivation," Spock replied.
Jim was shaken. Was he moved by pity? What had he hoped to accomplish by coming back here? "Spock--"

"Goodbye, Jim; goodbye, Leonard. Do not come back." Spock pivoted and left the table. The remaining two stared at their drinks a long time before downing

them and leaving silently.

Spock went directly to his room after the confrontation. He had maintained his mask and played his role well; now he felt drained and unsteady. He braced his arm against the wall and rested his head heavily against it as if to gain strength from the solidity. Why had it been so hard to see the two of them again, even McCoy. He cursed his weakness, his human heritage, but knew that even his Vulcan nature had felt the tug. It was requiring all of his meditative skills to remain calm, even now.

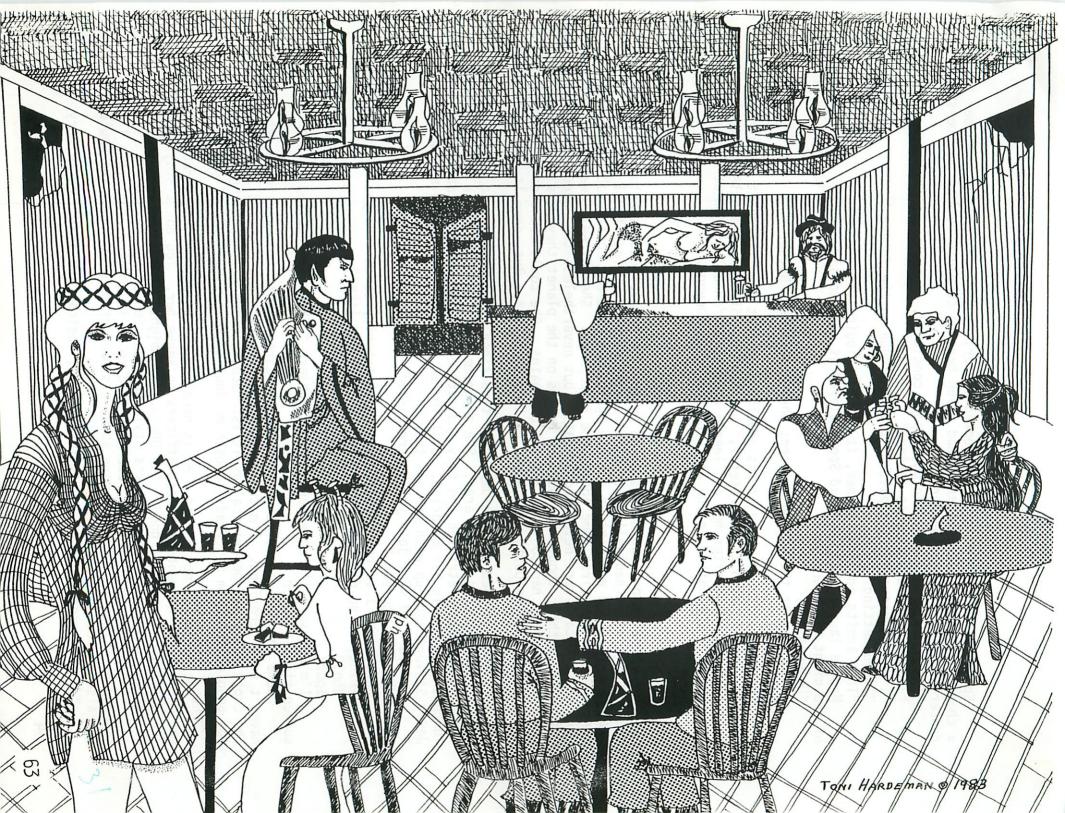
"What kind of performance be that, Bucko," a familiar voice called from the doorway. Spock whirled to face Maggie, her hand firmly planted on her hips.

"Performance?" he queried, eyebrows on the rise.

"With the two Fleetboys. Friends of yours?"

"Once--they still are."

"I told you before, I don't need whys," Maggie responded softly, "but talking about it may give perspective."



Spock sat heavily on his bed, looked at her, considered, and motioned her to a chair. Fifteen minutes later he had given her the complete outline of the story concerning his coming to Outworld.

"There is nothing they can do," Spock concluded,

"True, Bucko, but they be caring,"

"I must begin anew; the past must not intrude on the future."

"Too upsetting?"

"That admits emotion; rather, it is too illogical."

Maggie laughed out loud and Spock stared at her stonily. "Okay, take the rest of the night off," she said.
"Unnecessary."

"I be boss at the Golden Unicorn; what I say goes, Bucko."

"Verv well."

She rose and put a hand on his shoulder and felt him stiffen at the contact. "One day you'll learn to be grateful," she sighed. She turned and left quickly. He closed the door after her and leaned against it for a long moment afterwards. "Thank you," he breathed to the door and the people beyond.

X

Christine Chapel had been shocked by Spock's precipitous departure, but in the ensuing weeks had walled off her feelings about that individual with the knowledge that she would never see him again. And she had considerable feelings, carried since she first came aboard the Enterprise. She was well aware that they were not logical, were never reciprocated, but nevertheless they were there. She tried not to think about him, but now he was on the planet they were orbiting, and once more she had to face all the old pains. She could not even ask to be part of the landing party. It would be too ridiculous. But, damn it, the desire was strong.

Christine sighed for the umpteenth time since they settled into orbit as she entered the main dining area. She programmed the selector for a salad, crackers and black coffee, retrieved the tray and settled at a small empty table to eat her lunch and wallow in her memories. Lost in her own reverie, she did not notice Jerry Stevers come up with her own tray.

"Do you mind if I join you?" Jerry asked.

"What--oh, surely."

"Christine, I've been looking for an opportunity to talk to you. I feel like I'm walking in the dark and stumbling. What was he like?"

"Who?" "Spock."

"I'm not sure I'm an expert on that subject," Christine replied with a sudden rise in color.

"Come on, Christine, it's no secret you cared about him, even to me, though I haven't been here long. I'm trying to fill a role without a script. I can't ask the captain; he's hypercritical as it is. Scotty knows all about engines, but not people, and I am not ready to bare my soul to McCoy. I need to talk to a woman. You."

"The captain's not so bad. He is hard on all the bridge crew because he loves the Enterprise; he wants the best officers to serve her. You don't stay on the bridge if you aren't any good. Ask Uhura. She might also be a better source of objective information about Spock's style and function on the bridge."

"I did," Jerry admitted. "She just told me he is a Vulcan and since I had studied on Vulcan I would know more about his mode of behavior than she would.

She also respected him enormously."

"We all respected him. He is intelligent, logical and dedicated; a very

compelling man in his own way. He and the captain were very close friends and he missed him; he trusted Spock's advice implicitly. He was also the science officer, you know."

"Yes, I suppose that is a monument to him that he had to be replaced by two

people. Was he without flaws?"

"Well, he made small allowance for human failings; he demanded as much of others as he did of himself. His pride in his Yulcan heritage could be almost insufferable. But, I think he maintained balance through his sense of humor. Oh, he never laughed and almost never smiled and his word plays on the surface did not have to be humorous, but listening to a McCoy-Spock argument was frequently sheer entertainment."

"So he was neither a perfect human nor a perfect Vulcan..."

"The better of both, I think," Christine said simply. "How did he and the captain interact on the bridge?"

"I didn't see much of that, of course, but the captain asked the questions and Spock supplied the answers. You know how Vulcans are. Spock would never voice his assessment of a situation unless he were at least 80% sure. It took a crisis to get him to operate intuitively and let people know it."

"Interesting," Jerry mused, more to herself than her lunch companion.

Christine looked directly at Jerry and held her eye. "Off the grapevine, you're doing fine. You've earned the respect of your fellow officers, and you're effective. Give the captain more time. He's not only lost a competent officer, but his best friend."

"Thanks, Christine. I'll remember that when things get rocky. I've got to

get back to the bridge; I'm on in five minutes."

Kirk and McCoy returned to the *Enterprise* shortly after Stevers entered the bridge. When the captain arrived, he immediately issued a flurry of orders to get the ship underway. She guessed they had seen Spock and that he had refused to be "rescued." The captain was in a foul mood, ordering a Class I check and battle readiness drills all the way to the next disappearance site and origin planet.

XI

The day was chilly and soggy in Owlfor. It rained more or less steadily and the wind gusted and calmed with sufficient randomness to get water in every exterior nook and cranny of the town. In the overcast Owlfor looked grey and wet, precisely like any other rainy locale on any other planet. Spock, not wishing to be confined to his room, yet not wishing to venture out in the foul weather, spent the afternoon at the Golden Unicorn playing three dimensional chess with an Andorian miner-adventurer. His opponent, while not galactic class, was annoyingly good. Spock could win over fifty percent of the time and draw thirty percent of the time, but it was the remaining twenty percent that provided the stimulation. This particular game was very stimulating.

"Ah, mate in four moves," Shrev said softly moving his castle to queen's

level 2.

"You have played well today," Spock acceded, noncommitally, moving his knight into position.

Shrev furrowed his brow lightly and saw his opportunity. "It is a pleasure

to play with you; I learn something every game."

"Yes, your opening was the same I used two weeks ago," Spock commented studying the boards.

"With equal effect, I trust."

Suddenly Spock saw an opening and pounced on his piece. "Check." Shrev, try as he might, could not find a way to reverse this sudden turn of

eyents. He was not in mate, but eyen an amateur would be able to get him there from the current configuration. "You really sieze your opportunities."

"Whenever possible."

"Then why have you not signed on the Ibis? It is a merchant ship looking for a crew."

Spock came instantly alert. "I was not aware that a ship was in orbit."

"It came in last night--the night port guard is my house mate." Shrev looked past Spock to the entrance of the Golden Unicorn. Two men had just entered and were shaking out their raingear. "I signed on this morning--as a matter of fact,

there are the captain and quartermaster."

Spock turned and studied the two men carefully as Maggie waited on them at the bar. The older one was tall and lithely built, much like Spock himself. There the comparison ended, for the other man was golden: amber eyes, strawyellow hair, even a peculiar golden sheen to his skin unlike anything Spock had ever seen. The man identified as the quartermaster was shorter but still of average height, seeming to fold in on himself and giving the appearance of habitual cringing. His small eyes and ratlike features were made eyen more unpleasant by the sneering cast to his mouth. The two were a study in striking contrasts.

"Come," Shrey motioned, "I will introduce you."

Spock followed the Andorian to the bar.

"Spock, this is Captain Pollux of the Ibis," Shrey said. "This one is

Quartermaster Reeyes," he indicated of the other.

Spock inclined his head at each of the introductions. Without preamble he made his request, "I seek a position as crew on a merchant vessel and I understand you may have an opening. May I sign on?"

"We've too damn many now," Reeves retorted in a nasal whine.

Looking archly at his comrade who cringed under his gaze, Pollux put in, "Nonsense, we are always on the lookout for good crew. Spock, do you know engines?" "Yes, but I know computers, navigational and otherwise, better."

"Could you handle navigation and back up on engines?"

"Of course."

"Then beam up your gear now; we leave in the morning."

Reeves muttered something under his breath about crowding and not trusting

pointy-eared Vulcans, but another stare from Pollux silenced him.

"I shall do so now, but I do have a commitment to finish my performances today," Spock added. He looked at Maggie, who was giving him a most peculiar look. She nodded.

"Very well, but we will leave promptly at 0800 hours planet time," Pollux acceded.

After Spock's last set Maggie motioned him over to her table in the far corner. A quick movement of her index finger against her lips indicated that she wished to speak to him quietly.

"You can't sign on the *Ibis*," she whispered.

Spock's right eyebrow shot up.

"I've been around this arm of the galaxy a lot and I've run into my share of men, ship's captains included. Pollux not be captain of the Ibis."

"Perhaps he was replaced," Spock countered.

She shook her head emphatically. "Patel owned the Ibis. He were in a trade partnership, a successful one, with his lifelong friend. Something be wrong, Bucko, badly wrong," she concluded.

Spock sat back thoughtfully. "I will consider what you have said. If you

will excuse me, I will return to my room."

He rose and left under her pleading scrutiny. He did not notice the drunk

passed out three tables away, although the listening device in the drunk's ear would have excited Spock's scientific curiosity. Not only was it extremely tiny, but it could also be set for distance and direction. It had been set for their table.

After she had ushered out the last customer in the small hours of the morning Maggie helped the bartender straighten up. The clean-up crew would come during the day, but it was hard to leave complete disarray. Bidding the bartender good

night, she checked everything over once more before locking up.

As soon as she stepped into the street she felt a foreboding. Maggie looked around; the street was well lit and she could see nothing amiss. Still the short hairs on her neck were standing straight out, and she slipped her personal phaser down her sleeve and into her hand. It was an illegal weapon on Outworld, but explaining it would be easier if she were alive. Maggie took five paces down the street and froze when she heard a small sound to her left. Whirling to face the noise, she almost got a shot off before the energy beam hit her. She crumpled and lay still.

Spock, resting in his room, saw the flash of light outside and shot out of bed and down the stairs to the private exit. Running to the heap in the street he perceived it to be a person—Maggie. Gently he turned her over and saw no light of life in the wide staring eyes. Spock touched her check in gentle benediction. The look on her face was one of surprise rather than pain and Spock knew her end had been quick. He cradled her head and closed her eyes, then lifted her easily into his arms. Carrying her to the space port authority, Spock wished he could have demonstrated the gratitude she had wanted. He shoved that line of thought abruptly aside and retreated solidly into Vulcan thinking. He made a report and arranged for her burial and other legal matters. The port authority informed him he would not be detained as he did not actually see the attack, so he was free to leave on the *Ibis*.

When Spock beamed up later that morning, Shrev was already aboard and preparations were being made for departure. Reeves showed Spock to his appointed station as computer navigator and reminded him who was crew boss. The captain had not yet entered the bridge, so Reeves belittled and berated all the bridge crew alike. Spock found his console to be simplistic and was pleased to discover he had lost none of his facility with either computers or navigation.

"What heading should be set?" Spock inquired of Reeves who was now facing

him across the console.

The other man's hand shot out and slapped Spock soundly on the cheek to Spock's stunned surprise. "You'll speak only when spoken to and address me as 'sir,' Reeves shrilled at him.

Before Reeves could deliver another blow, Spock grabbed his wrist in a crushing grip. He stood to look down on the bullying little man and said in a barely audible voice, "You will not touch me again, sir." Spock locked eyes with the quartermaster until the other looked away with a deep flush.

Unnoticed, Pollux had entered the bridge. "Up to your old trick, Reeves? I've warned you before, but this time I think you've met your match. Now get

out!" Reeves scurried out with a mumbled response.

Spock glanced around to see approval of him written on the faces of the two other crew members. The helmsman of the vessel was an Andorian and the communications person was a human female who dressed in a short, sleeveless, one-piece turquoise jumpsuit. She had the body for it, along with auburn hair and green eyes. When Pollux made the introductions around, Spock learned the Andorian was Tov and the woman was called Aurea.

Everyone on the bridge synchronized easily as if they had been working together for months rather than minutes. Efficiently the *Ibis* moved out of orbit and into its new heading toward the Theta sector. None of the bridge complement conversed beyond what was necessary for running the ship, but there was a supportive ambience

that was almost palpable.

At the end of his watch Spock headed alone for the crew's quarters while Aurea and Tov went to the galley. Spock had noted a dimly lit corridor when he had first come aboard to stow his gear and his Vulcan curiosity was getting to him, though he would have disavowed his motivation. Checking to see if he were observed, Spock moved down the corridor in question. Suddenly he felt an object pressed against his ribs and a too-familiar voice hissing, "Snooping?"
"I must have made a wrong turn returning to my quarters," Spock replied evenly.

Reeves eyes him suspiciously yet hesitated, even though he was behind a phaser and Spock was unarmed. "This area is off limits to crew."

"I shall remember," responded Spock cryptically.

Turning, he left the quartermaster standing there, following him with his eyes and the business end of a phaser.

IIX

Spock settled into the Ibis routine easily. There was not much to do other than his bridge watches and there appeared to be no cargo to speak of that required tending. He kept his distance from Reeyes and, indeed, the rest of the crew; with the former, motivation was caution, the latter, habit. Spock did, however, listen well, trying to determine the purpose of the voyage. Many of the crew were like himself, only recently signed. The old timers simply did not talk business. And then there was that mysterious corridor. From his best estimates Spock decided that the corridor accessed the lower third of the roughly cylindrical vessel, primarily cargo holds. It was frustrating to not even be able to make discrete inquiries of his fellow crewmen, as he could not be sure of their loyalties.

Fifteen days after leaving Outworld Spock succumbed to his curiosity. He moved with catlike grace in the shadows of the forbidden corridor. It was late evening by ship time, and attired in his habitual black under the night running lights he was as invisible as he could be without a personal cloaking device. He paused to listen for signs of occupation in this area of the ship, but all he could hear was the distant thrum of the engines. Assured that he was unobserved, Spock proceeded noiselessly to the access hatch. Trying the latch, he was startled to discover the door unlocked. Opening it just wide enough to slip inside, he then closed it silently behind him and found himself in total darkness. He reached into his pocket for the pencil beam he carried for just such situations. He switched it on and the room lit up in a blaze of light--far too much light.

"Don't move," a familiar voice called from behind some plastiform crates. Spock turned to the source with a sinking sensation of being caught without a logical reason for being there. His eyes had adjusted to the sudden shift in light intensity and he noted theequipment control panels which appeared to be activated and a seven foot horizontal slab with five open metal hoops attached.

Nefarious possibilities filled his mind.

Reeves stepped from his hiding place with a phaser leveled at Spock's belt.

"Now that you've seen it, I guess you want a demonstration."

Spock dove to his right to get under cover, but was just a fraction too slow--the beam caught him in mid-dive. The pins and needles of whole body paralysis caught him before he could break his fall and he crashed headlong into some machinery. The last thing Spock heard was Reeves' vicious laugh before he sank into the green haze.

When Spock came slowly to consciousness his first sensation was a throbbing pain centered along the top of his skull--then he discovered he could not move. Fearing permanent injury, he cracked his eyes partway open and was surprised to find he was looking at the ceiling. With a rush sensation returned; he could determine that he was strapped down to a horizontal surface, a restraint across his forehead. His cheek felt stiff and he realized it had to be dried blood—he must have split his scalp in the fall.

A person moved into his line of vision and Spock was not at all surprised to

see that it was Captain Pollux.

"Ah, you are conscious. Good."

"Why am I restrained?" Spock queried.

"You will learn soon enough. Why did you come here?"

"I was curious."

"That, at least, is part of the truth," Pollux observed. "Reeyes, turn on the console and leave us," he ordered.

The task accomplished, Pollux turned his attention back to the immobile man

before him. "Think about the Enterprise."

"What enterprise?" Spock asked innocently.

"Let us not play games. You were her first officer until your court martial. It is hard to keep such a high-level dismissal secret."

"As you say, it is no secret," returned Spock, feeling the heat of rising

color about his pointed ears.

"Think about the Enterprise," Pollux repeated.

"Why?"

"For a variety of reasons. Not the least of which is this." Pollux depressed a silver button on a remote control device he carried. For a moment Spock felt nothing, then a pressure began to build inside his skull, not so much a physical thing, but real nonetheless. Spock remembered the Klingon Mind Sifter, and desperately sought misdirection of his thoughts in Vulcan discipline. The effort left him breathless and sweat beaded his upper lip. Pollux again touched the silver button and Spock gasped for air, "What do you want?"

"The Enterprise."

Unprepared for the answer both the Yulcan's eyebrows climbed in surprise.

"It's really quite simple: the *Enterprise* is to be exchanged for one of my ships. Actually, in a way, your being here is fortunate. I failed in my attempt to eliminate the *Enterprise* when it began to follow my path too closely. Now my failure will prove advantageous after all."

Spock said nothing.

"I suppose I do owe you some sort of explanation. You see, you have an intimate acquaintence with the *Enterprise*. This machinery is capable of exchanging matter between your universe and mine, but requires a focus. Your mind will act as the focusing agent needed to bring a shipload of my people here. When we have moved enough Thovians here, we can take our rightful place as overlords of this universe."

"There were others who have attempted it and failed, and some occupants of this universe who seem on a more advanced plane than you. How will you overcome their opposition?" Spock observed levelly.

"They will not recognize us or our intent as we infiltrate the populations

until it is too late. We are not so different from other humanoids."

"But why?" Spock asked, buying time as he tested his bonds unobtrusively. Right now Jim Kirk would be a welcome sight, he thought. But the metal bands were inflexible and rescue was parsecs away and receeding further with every moment.

"Yes," Pollux mused, "a full explanation might even earn your cooperation. You are a logical creature, after all. Universes are rarely stable forms; some expand and contract at regular intervals. Some contract continuously to a density even more massive than a black hole and some expand infinitely until they lose entropy and cohesion. Then they cease to exist as well as all matter and energy forms contained therein. I am, of course, describing my universe. We have been aware for some time that we were about to pass the point of disintegration and we

have been searching for a way out. Our scientists recently made such a break-through with one specially equipped ship. Once this was achieved, once the connection with your universe could be established, it was relatively easy to bring through other ships by the exchange method. It is unfortunate that the process requires a living focus, a 'Judas goat' in one of your obscure terminologies, but it is a matter of our survival."

"Why not bring others over as you came, or unload your ships and exchange

them?"

Pollux looked troubled for a moment. "The process without exchange is so energy extravagant it would precipitate the dissolution after only four such trips. We have only one hundred of your years left, and we need our ships to conquer and rule."

"The whole scheme is illogical; it cannot work," Spock observed.

"It will! It must!"

Spock heard the fine line of fanaticism ring in Pollux's tone and knew he could not press the issue. If the people of that universe were of the same cast, his own universe could expect a bloody future. He must not give in.

"It is useless to resist," Pollux stated as if divining his victim's thoughts.

"You will weaken or you will sleep and we have many ways of assisting you to

focus," he said, stepping toward Spock with a hypospray.

Spock felt a sting in his right bicep and burning through his veins as the substance Pollux injected moved inexorably through his body. His muscles seemed to lose tone and his eyelids grew neavy. When he tried to speak again he discovered he had no control over yoluntary movement. He could see and hear and taste and feel...

"Think about the Enterprise." Again pressure mounted.

Spock mentally screamed at his helplessness and the utter necessity of resistance.

Three times more the silver button was depressed and he was now drenched in sweat. He concentrated on Vulcan disciplines to block sensation, then just to focus his mind on anything but--"Tiger, tiger, burning bright..."

Spock's innate time sense told him he had been in this room for two hours.

He wondered what Pollux did to the others who had been in his position.

"I am getting tired of this," Pollux spat as he pressured another injection into Spock's arm. The drug heightened all his senses exquisitely. "This one has nasty side effects, but makes the subject highly suggestible. Think about your friends. Think about James T. Kirk."

"Four score and seven years ago..."

The pressure mounted excruciatingly and Spock almost blacked out this time.

"Captain Kirk, the Enterprise!."

Spock's body had passed the point of exhaustion, the chemicals having drained all his reserves in the attempt to break his will. The monotony of voice and mental stressing continued. There were more sophisticated information gathering devices, Spock thought. The Mind Sifter was more effectively designed. It was fortunate Jim did not have to endure that.

"Enterprise!" Pollux shouted at his subject, backhanding him across the mouth.

The slip was sudden and overwhelming. Spock thought of home, escape, and pictured the *Enterprise*, not Vulcan. There was a sickening mind wrench and he knew he had betrayed his captain and the crew. His stomach knotted and his face burned.

"At last," his tormentor whispered, almost in relief.

The restraining bands snapped open and hands lifted Spock from the slab and carried him deeper into the hidden regions of the ship. Spock registered this subliminally as if his primary senses were refusing to work; his humiliation was bitter gall. That he was alive seemed a mockery, yet he had to find a way to

bring them back, to go home. He was laid perfunctorily on a yielding surface and left alone--now came sleep to heal his weary body, and dream to heal his overwrought mind.

IIIX

The Enterprise wobbled dizzily and wrenched sickeningly. There were endless moments of total disorientation for her crew and suddenly they were--nowhere.

The bridge crew quickly recovered from the stasis of trauma and went automatically into a check of their instrumentation. The view screen was almost blank, only a few faint distant stars were visible. It was definitely not the region of space they had been traversing. Kirk looked on his crew with approving pride; good crew, they function through anything.

"I thought that roller coaster would never reach bottom," Sulu muttered with

a sidelong glance at Powell, who was in the navigator's seat.

"And then, unfortunately, it did," the navigator agreed. "At the risk of being trite," Kirk intoned, "where are we?"

"Nowhere," Stevers responded.

"That is singularly unhelpful," Kirk retorted.

"I mean the star patterns do not match any known configuration. Either we

are outside the galaxy or somewhere else entirely."

"Commander Stevers is quite correct," the science officer interposed. "I have a complete analysis and not only do the star patterns not match known configurations, but even the composition of space does not match expected norms."

"You mean we are somewhere else?"

"I believe that is what I said," Senek put in mildly.

The human members of the crew were not so unperturbed. Although no one

reacted overtly, the shock of that statement was obvious.

"Well, we seem to be in an alternate universe, then," Kirk stated, remembering the other, dangerous times he faced a similar position. "Is it a mirror universe?"

"Apparently not, for the stars are not in familiar patterns and other galaxies are not registering on my sensors at all," Senek observed. "This is

interesting..."

"Go on," Kirk snapped.

"The density of particulate matter in space is considerably lower than in

"The stars too are further apart," Stevers observed from the navigator's

console.

"What are the implications?" Kirk asked.

"We appear to be in an expanding universe. As to the implications, I will need more time to formulate any tentative conclusions," Senek replied.

"Very well. Senior officers will meet in the briefing room in one hour, if

that will be enough time to complete your observations."

"Indeed, yes," Senek nodded. "Shipwide circuit, Uhura."

"Aye, sir."

"Captain to crew. You are undoubtedly wondering what has happened in the last fifteen minutes. We appear to have been transported to an alternate universe of unusual properties. How or why is unanswerable at this moment. In the meantime, carry on with your normal duties and maintain yellow alert status. As soon as we know anything concrete you will be informed. Kirk out." The captain flipped the transmit switch to off and glanced around at the bridge crew. Their alert but calm poses reassured him.

"Stevers, take the con, then have Mr. Sulu relieve you when it is time to

come to the briefing room." Kirk said as he headed toward the exit. "Uhura, notify the other senior officers of the meeting. I'll be in my quarters until then."

"Aye, sir," came the answering chorus.

The officers had already assembled when Kirk entered: Scotty, Senek, Stevers, McCoy, Uhura, and Tsu of Security. There were no smiles in the group and even the usual friendly exchanges were absent.

"I want this meeting to be official," Kirk began, "right down to log recordings. Agreed?" With everyone quickly nodding affirmation he punched the appropriate buttons. In response to the ready light he began, "Enterprise Log: Stardate 7183.4; meeting of ranking officers on spacial anomaly. Mr. Senek, would

you begin, please?"

"As I speculated earlier, we appear to be in another universe entirely. The first clue was that the temperature of 'space' registered 0.5 of a degree, considerably colder than our own universe on the absolute scale. On further observation I find that the mean distance between stars is one million light years and the minimum distance is one hundred light years. The majority of stellar observations show a red shift. In short, this universe is losing entropy and expanding to nothingness. Perhaps even the fabric of space will be disrupted."

"Speculation, Mr. Senek?" McCoy observed ironically.

"No, conjecture," Senek responded without inflection. McCoy had tried to bait Senek a little, perhaps hoping to carry on his entertaining feud with a Vulcan. To date he had met at most only an icy stare.

"How long to the cricital point, laddie?"

"A millenia at most."

"Well, at least that isn't a pressing concern," Kirk responded.

"But we do have some urgent problems," Jerry broke in. "We have exactly one month of food supplies left, if we employ strict rationing. If my observations are correct, we are two months from the nearest star with a planetary system, and it is impossible to determine if there will be anything of value there if we could reach it. We were due to take on supplies just before we arrived here." At this announcement the humans in the group paled visibly.

"No chance for error?" Kirk asked.

"I have verified the computations myself," responded Senek. "They are correct."
"Power will nae be a problem for at least three months, even at top warp speed."

"Thanks for some good news," the captain acknowledged.

"The psychological pressures will be enormous. Even if we don't tell the crew, it would take an idiot not to figure out what was happening, especially if we go on a rationing system. Neuroses will be commonplace and I would expect severe psychoses and possible social disintegration in the last week."

"I hope we will be out of here before we can put your theories to a test,"

Uhura observed.

"Security is ready to take any measures necessary to maintain order," Tsu affirmed.

"But 'who guards the guards?'" quipped McCoy.
"Uhura," Kirk broke in nodding for her report.

"Without equipment, communication is highly unlikely either inter-or intrauniverse. We have, however, been picking up some faint, fairly regular signals which my staff are investigating. So far we have no response to our beamed messages on these frequencies nor has their meaning been broken."

"Follow up on that. It seems our best hope," Kirk ordered.

"Jim, what can we do; will we get out of this?" McCoy, as usual, framed the question all had wanted to ask.

"I honestly don't know, but I for one am not going to give up without trying," Kirk said levelly.

"The odds are 1,872,342.5 to 1 against us," Senek observed.

"I didn't need to know that," McCoy muttered.

"Do you suggest, Mr. Senek, that we do nothing?" the captain queried. Senek looked nonplussed. "No, but any action will probably not help." Senek looked nonplussed. "Will it hinder?"

"No."

"A million to one, but there is a chance," Stevers stated.

"Very well, ladies and gentlemen, we will try to improve our chances. McCoy, you take charge of the food rationing. Tsu, maintain alert status among your people. Uhura, check the signals and see if you can pinpoint their location. Scotty, give us all the power you've got and receive your coordinates from Uhura. Jerry, I want you and Senek to continue investigating any possibilities, alternatives, etc. I expect immediate updates on any changes. I'll make my announcement to the crew in half an hour. Dismissed--except for you, Bones. Log off."

After an affirmative chorus and scraping of chairs, Kirk and McCoy were left alone. The captain stretched out in his chair locking his fingers behind his head.

Several moments of silence passed.

"Jim, I guess we know where those other ships disappeared to."

"Right. Bones, should I tell the crew?"

"Tell them what?"

"Everything: time line, rationing, supplies."

McCoy paused; he knew the crew of the Enterprise better than anyone aboard, their weakness and strengths. One end was as bad as another, but this ship was special, largely because of the people aboard. "Yes, the whole story, now," he replied firmly.

"Good, I'm glad to have my decision confirmed," Kirk said with a wry grin.

"Then why ask?"

"It's nice to have someone else who knows you're right."

McCoy snorted. The captain punched the intercom and repeated the whole story.

XIV

The compartment spread out before Spock like a large white arena surrounded by archways to smaller lit rooms such as the one in which he was confined. The construction material was unlike anything he was aware of, though it felt like a padded plastic. His focus sharpened as he saw that the other cells were also occupied. Rising, he walked to the arch but was prevented from entering the main area by a forcefield. He could see most of the inhabitants and noted without surprise that they represented most of the spacefaring civilizations of this side of the galaxy. Shrev occupied the cell immediately adjacent to his on the right and was similarly engaged in observation. What did provoke an exclamation of surprise was the occupant of the room two places to his left.

"Subcommander Tal!" Quickly he surpressed his reaction, but not his

curiosity. "Why are you here?"

"For the Avenger," the other responded woodenly. "It is in the same place where the Enterprise is now. I suppose I can get some kind of satisfaction from that."

"But how?"

"Since you obviously know of the workings of the exchange device, I assume you mean how am I here. Someone's head had to roll after the theft of the Cloaking Device. So the commander was disciplined and I was discharged," he spat bitterly.

"How is the commander?" Spock asked softly.

"Oh, she was on board and still commander. She lands on her feet like a t'lingat--and she has powerful friends. So, I have my life and she is gone." The anger in his voice was overlaid with regret--or perhaps more.

"You could not resist the persuasion."

"Nor you," Tal observed grimly.

"What is the order of things here?" Spock asked in an attempt to move the

conversation to less painful topics.

At this point Shrev broke in. "I am sorry to see you here, but to respond to your question, we are fed twice daily in the central arena, in shifts--compatable species only. Lights are dimmed for a ten hour rest period."

"Monitors?" Spock queried.

"Unknown, but probable," Tal answered.

"Is the food delivered?"

"Yes, by Reeves, but we are not released until he is gone," said Shrev. "The door is never opened while we are in the central area," Tal added. "Have any attempts been made to escape?"

"A silly one involving trying to break the door down--more a case of a being

going berserk, I think," answered Tal with a grimace of distaste.

Spock tested the force field once again and fell into silent concentration trying to fit together an escape equation. Mealtime came and he was glad to see that he, Tal and Shrev were judged compatable species together with Aurea, who had joined the group when he was sleeping, another human, two blue skinned, antennaed Andorians and a Klingon. Altogether there were a score of inhabitants of the arena compound including a vicious feline Kzin, several Tellurite, a lizardlike Gorn and some species even Spock did not recognize. He ate his first meal isolated by his own silence, but acutely observing the interaction of his group. He timed all possible intervals—it had been two minutes from the time the food was set out and Reeves had left to release the force field before he had been able to leave his cell. The food was nourishing if unpalatable—a lumpy gruel to be washed down with water, food to be consumed with a disposable spoon. From the slowdown in his physiological reaction, Spock determined they were also being fed a tranquilizer.

Shrev broke his reverie by coming to him with a water soaked napkin. "May I?" he said, indicating Spock's head. Spock nodded and braced. The weal on his scalp was deep but not serious. It had, however, bled freely and now dried blood matted his hair. His head was sore and the cleaning hurt, but he was glad of the assistance.

After thirty minutes Reeves returned wielding a phaser rifle set on wide scan. Spock was informed later that if there was any trouble, the whole group was stunned, thus preventing a few from drawing fire so that the others could get to their captor. Reeves motioned them into their cells muttering about the garbage they left behind, the remnants of their meal. Spock complied stoically as did the others, but they did not hurry. Once back in their confines the security field was reactivated.

Reeves stepped to Spock's cell and leered at him. "You should've listened to that female wrestler--you would have been safe and sound back on Outworld."
"Would she?"

"No, she figured out too much for her own good. But she was quick; she almost got me. She must have been a whole lot of woman."

"I would not have fared better because of what I knew," Spock returned

levelly ignoring the innuendo.

"I heard you shacked up with her. Isn't that strange for a Vulcan? Well, there is no accounting for taste; maybe you like the earthy ones."

Spock turned toward the wall ignoring Reeves presence. To respond, to defend Maggie and himself would only prolong the goading. He controlled his hostility and was surprised to find he had clenched his fists so tightly that his nails had dug in and drawn blood. Then discipline took over and he could surpress such thoughts.

Reeves, tired of his game with an unresponsive victim or perhaps under the press of time, shoved the remains of one meal into the trash receptable at one end of the table, set the second, punched some buttons on the far wall and left

the arena.

The second group came out for their meal. This group included the Kzin, the Gorn, three heavy gravity humans, an Orion, and two tall beings dressed in black robes with black hoods completely covering their heads. Spock noted that even the Kzin gaye them wide berth. He felt a feather touch on his mind as though a wind sighed through an aspen grove with only the barest hint of movement. He looked up to find one of the black figures turned toward him. Telepath? He felt then a rumbling chuckle in his head. Ordering his thoughts into galactic interspeak, he projected, //Can you send verbal transmissions?//

//If necessary,// came the bemused response without voice. //Can you transmit to more than one mind at a time?//

//Yes.//

Spock considered the ramifications.

//This pointless exchange wearies me.// At that the mind touch vanished. The final group was comprised of the physically weaker beings, the Tellurites, several avian hominids of different species—one sported bright orange plumage with silver wing tips and bright yellow skin on his legs and around his deep purple eyes while the other was totally green. There was a creature that looked like a sea anemone who moved about on cillia and an Edoan with its tripodal structure.

Suddenly Spock sat bolt upright on the sleeping platform of his cell. "Tal, why are we kept alive?"

"What?" came the slow response as Tal shook off his somnolence.

"Why are we not killed or off loaded on some planet?"

"I do not know--and maybe it is not the kind of question that should be raised," Tal answered.

"Wait, I believe he may be asking the right question," Shrev broke in.

"Could it be that for the transfer to continue we, the focusing agents, must be maintained on board?" Spock's thoughts spun away, carrying him onward in intellectual excitment. "Possibly if we were killed or left the ship or at least got outside a certain range, the transference would reverse. It would mean that mere escape would be sufficient to thwart the Thovians' plans."

"But what about Reeves?" Shrev asked quietly, reluctantly. "He has been off

the ship and nothing happened."

"What indeed," Tal muttered, but then the realization broke over him like a wave. "But the *Ibis* is his ship! He is not needed to maintain transferance."

"But the Ibis did disappear," Spock pointed out.

"...And was refitted and brought back to carry out further transfers," Tal continued. "What better disguise could be used than a ship already known in this area of the galaxy! Who would scrutinize a trader? On outlying worlds they could even use the correct registry with the expectation that no one would know the difference in crew or even of the disappearance."

"But why expend the energy to bring the Ibis back?" Spock mused.

"There is plenty of room for equipment and people storage," Shrev pointed out, continuing Tal's line of reasoning. "In some of the lower holds you could even stow a small ship. It might simply be the shell for the alien ship."

"Very astute," came a voice which seemed to emmanate from the walls. "You surprise me in your reasoning ability." It was clearly Pollux speaking, which confirmed the bugging of their prison. "All you have to do is escape, but that is impossible. Attempted suicide will force us to remove and store your brains. When you finally die of old age our plans will be complete and you will become superfluous."

"I suspect the transferred ships will also have run out of supplies by

then," Spock observed quietly.

"True, so you are the lucky ones," Pollux said with a mirthless laugh. "Fascinating."

XV

Stevers was working twelve hour watches in an effort to determine maximum information concerning the universe in which they found themselves. Much of her time was spent in the auxiliary control room where she had complete access to the computer terminals. After four days on this schedule she was drawn fine. Senek was keeping the same pace, but being Yulcan he showed no strain. They worked well together; Stevers' training on Yulcan gave her keen insight on Yulcan work habits. She restricted her interactions to the computer terminals while Senek worked in one of the engineering labs.

On one of her infrequent breaks she walked down the hall, staring off into space abstracted from her surroundings and straight into Jim Kirk as he turned

a corner in the corridor.

Jerry was abruptly jerked back to reality by being knocked on her backside. After a stunned ten seconds, Kirk extended his hand and asked, "Are you all right?"

Stevers went crimson and waived off his implied assistance. "I am sorry, Captain; this is so clumsy of me. I wasn't watching where I was going."

"I could not plan a better way to get close to you, and off the bridge you

can call me Jim." He grinned in his best little boy fashion.

Jerry tightened her jaw muscles as she scrambled to her feet. "Really, Captain?" she responded in an arch voice.

"Enough is enough, I won't eat you," he answered in exasperation.

"That doesn't live up to your reputation either as an officer or a man," Jerry shot back.

"Oh, brother, you make me sound like a combination ogre and satyr."

"Well, as far as I am concerned--may I speak frankly, sir?"

"Of course."

"You have been an ogre to me, questioning my judgement, hardly a good word at all."

"I have trouble relating to anyone who is ready to misinterpret everything I say. I guess I have been living down to your opinion of me," Kirk admitted.

Stevers was momentarily speechless. Could she have been provoking his response? She was willing to concede some fault on both sides.

"Well, shall we declare a truce, then?" she said with a smile.

Kirk smiled back at her. "Done," and offered his hand. As she took it the ship gave a sudden lurch. Stevers was thrown off balance into Jim's arms.

"Now, how did you manage that?" she gasped with a glint in her eye. They had been standing next to a wall com so Kirk simply hit the bridge

button. "This is the captain. What happened?"

"Sorry, sir," Sulu responded. "We seem to have passed through some sort of spacial anomaly. No damage has been reported."

"Keep me informed, Kirk out."

"Aye, sir."

Jim looked down and was surprised to find Jerry still in his arms. Her scent was fresh and her body was firm to the touch, and he found the male in him responding.

"Uh, Commander, this will very soon appear compromising," he addressed her

formally while disengaging.

"May I be honest again?" she inquired straightening her uniform into its usually precise tailored appearance.

"Of course."

"I begin to understand where you get your reputation. That was not unpleasant at all. As a matter of fact, if you were to ask me to your cabin to view your etchings, I would be seriously tempted."

"Seriographs."

"What?" she asked eyebrows on the rise.

"I have a good collection of optical illusion seriographs I would like to

show off," he said, his grin deepening to more serious pursuits.

"Really? I enjoy graphics tremendously," she said coyly. This is crazy, she thought to herself. He is a charmer, but what can be the harm in indulging myself a little.

"I really became interested when I came across some reproductions of the Old Earth artist Victor Vassarelly," he said conversationally, proferring his arm, which she accepted. "Of course, I don't have any of his works, but there are some modern artists who still follow the old craft."

"What attracted you--"

The com whistled for attention. "Bridge to Captain Kirk," Sulu called urgently.

"Kirk here," Jim replied after hitting the switch.

"Captain, we are picking up something on our scanners and we need your evaluation."

"Natural bodies?"

"No, sir, it appears to be a group of ships. So far they haven't reacted hostilely to our presence; they haven't reacted at all."

"Very well, I'm on my way. Kirk out." He looked regretfully down at

Stevers. "The etchings will have to wait."

"Seriographs. Lead on, Captain." They exchanged understanding smiles and proceeded to the bridge.

As Kirk rushed out of the turbolife he was struck by the view on the main screen: a jumble of ships of every possible design known in the galaxy and several improbable and unknown designs. He slid into his command chair, his attention riveted to the screen.

"Any response yet to our broadcasts, Lieutenant?" Kirk asked, addressing Uhura.

"None, sir."

"Commander Stevers, what is your evaluation of the position?" She had just slipped into the chair at her station and was poring over the readouts from her console.

"The energy levels are very low. At least three of the ships are derelicts. Several craft appear to have more life forms than would be normally expected. I feel they have come together for sheer survival and sharing of resources."

"You'd hardly expect that of Klingons and Romulans," Sulu muttered from his

position.

Ignoring Sulu's remark Kirk said, "I concur with your evaluation. Are the registries of any of the vessels known?"

"Sir," said Senek, "I believe you have previously encountered the Romulan

vessel. The Klingon vessel is the Devisor, which is currently captained by Koloth, another of your acquaintences."

Kirk gave a wry grin. Well, no need to wonder what kind of reception he should expect from those two. If they had a phaser bank between them, the Enterprise would now be pixie dust.

"Lieutenant Uhura, let's try that hailing frequency just once more, please."

"Ave, sir."

"Commander of the Romulan yessel, this is Captain James T. Kirk of the

Starship Enterprise. What is your status? May we be of assistance?"

The screen finally wavered and presented the image of the Romulan Commander as beautifully impressive as she had been at their last encounter. Her rayen hair was swept severely back revealing delicately pointed ears. Her upswept brows were drawn together in lines of continual concern. The close fitting high collared uniform tunic hung loosely on her frame, bespeaking a long time on short rations. But whatever her adverse experiences, her spirit was unbowed as evidenced in the set and cant of her chin and the passion of command in her eye.

"Captain Kirk, you have surmised our situation accurately. Even your face is welcome among us if you bring infinite energy sources and food for the thousand victims in our armada," she replied in a controlled voice.

As if on cue the Chief Engineer of the Enterprise entered the bridge and Kirk shot him a quick glance. At Scott's nod, he responded, "I'll let you speak to the Chief Engineer on the energy issue. As to food, we don't have much ourselves. How many days' supplies do you have?"

A shadow of disappointment crossed her face as she answered frankly, "Twenty

standard days with strict rationing."

"We don't have much more than that ourselves, but we will share what we Mr. Scott?"

"Hae ye gone daft, man?" Scott raged out of pickup range. "If we gi' them

the energy sources they can blast us to kingdom come!"

"Excuse us for a moment," Kirk said as he cut the transmission to the Romulan vessel. "Mr. Scott, we are very likely to die here, and whether we go quickly or die of slow starvation seems no choice. Have you noticed that none of the vessels out there appear battle damaged? If all of those groups can cooperate, then how much more so should we?" Kirk read indecision in Scott's eyes. "Mr. Scott, you have a reply to make." Once again the Commander appeared on the screen.

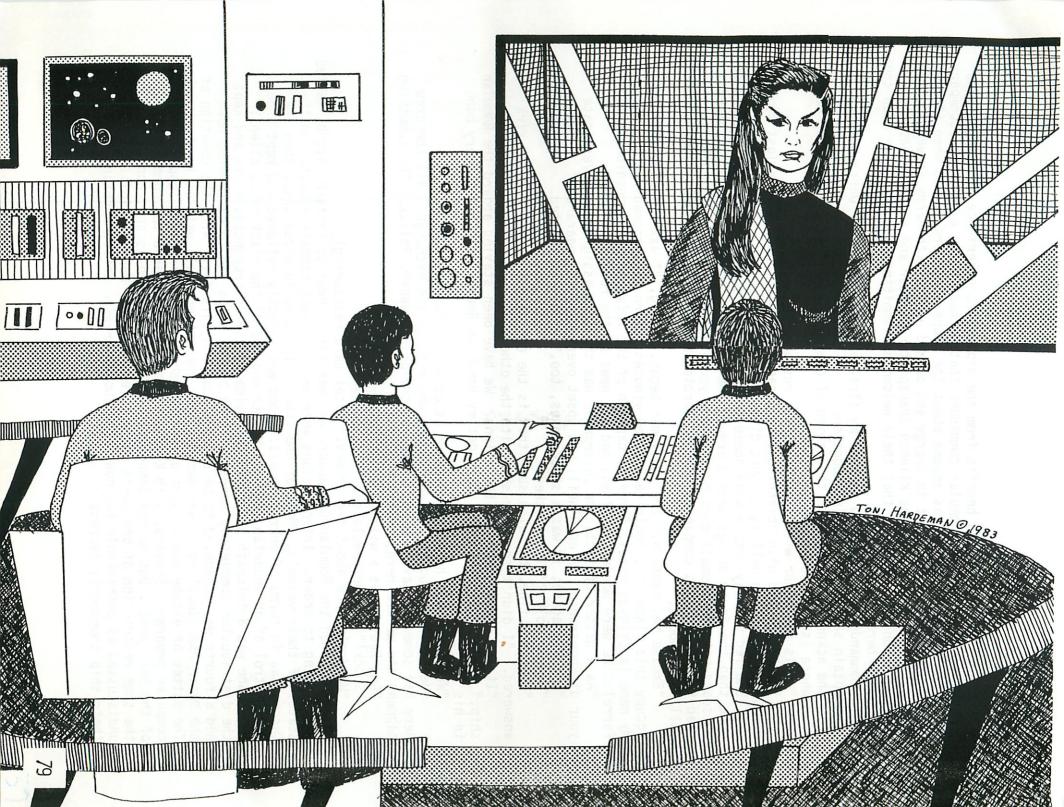
"Commander Montgomery Scott here. If you just ask your laddies to let me know what they need I can help with some spare dilithium crystals and we do have

fair antimatter reserves."

The Romulan Commander flashed him a brief smile. "I believe the correct response is 'Thank you.' We are having a general session of the Armada Council, as we style ourselves aboard the Devisor in one hour, captain. You and one of your officers are invited."

"Of course, we shall be there; transmit the coordinates. Kirk out." The bridge was silent for a moment as the screen faded to reveal the stars and the pitiful collection of ships hanging together. Uhura finally put into words the sentiments of the bridge complement. "In some ways this universe is better than our own."

Kirk spent a good part of the hour's wait determining who should accompany Scott was a good choice because of his engineering knowhow, but he was in the command line and Kirk decided he was indispensible. His personal preference was for Dr. McCoy as a friend and confidant. An additional argument in Bones' favor was the Klingon reverence for medical personnel. But McCoy was not an expert on the engineering details, nor the physics of the space they were in. That left Senek and Stevers. He still did not feel comfortable with his new science officer



and besides, Stevers could benefit from the diplomatic experience. It might also win some points with the Romulan commander that he had chosen a woman to accompany him. And she knew as much as anyone about the shape they were in, so when it came time to depart he left Scott in charge and beamed aboard with Jerry Stevers.

They materialized in the Klingon transporter chamber and after a second's reorientation Kirk observed that their welcoming committee was none other than the

commander herself.

"Commander, allow me to present my first officer, Commander Jerry Stevers," the captain said by way of introduction.

She acknowledged Jerry with a raise of one brow and a crisp nod of her head.

"And where is Commander Spock?"

"He is no longer with Starfleet," he responded flatly.

"Ah," she said with something like disappointment. "You are the last to

arrive; the meeting hall is a short distance from here."

She led the way into a wide domed chamber which could have easily accomodated more than the forty beings seated around the circular table. They were ushered to seats between a small dark human and a young redheaded freckled man half a head taller than his companion and two forbidding looking dark robed figures with full black hoods.

"Excuse me, captain," the small man began, rising, "I asked for you to occupy this place so I could talk a few minutes before the proceedings begin. My name is Srinvas Patel, formerly captain of the Ibis; and my companion is Tom Farrel. We were wondering if you had any news of the Federation...?"

"As a matter of fact, the Enterprise was the ship assigned to investigate

your disappearance. Fred O'Neill was upset over your disappearance."

"I can imagine; it was a shock to us, too," Patel interjected.

"And my folks?" Tommy asked.
"They are fine, but also sure this is the end of all space farers," Kirk

answered. "I didn't see your ship with the others."

"It was commandeered by the aliens. We have been staying aboard the Romulan ship," Patel offered. "If I could get my hands on Reeves, I'd break every bone in his body."

"What role did he play?" Stevers asked with interest.

"He was the Judas goat--the agent who effects the exchange. All the crew here had someone leave who was picked up the alien leader, Pollux. The something happens and we are here," Patel explained.

"And Reeves was a willing agent!" Tommy added. "Spock!" Stevers exclaimed in a stunned whisper.

"We don't know about the others," Patel said reassuringly.

Just then the Romulan Commander, who was seated next to Captain Koloth, called the meeting to order. Introductions were made and each captain reported on the status of their vessels. Most of the other ships were in worse shape than the Enterprise in terms of energy levels. Food was strictly rationed and kept under the control of an Andorian captain, Koloth and one of the black robed aliens. Since she was a telepath she could determine if any discrepancies arose and kept the distribution completely honest. Three of the ships had to be powered down and a fourth was scheduled to be under discussion this day. With the donation of the Enterprise supplies it was decided that the matter could wait at least a week. The matter of escape was brought up and rehashed like an infinite loop in a computer program. Stevers, with Kirk's approval, volunteered the computer capacity of the *Enterprise*, but no one thought it truly possible to escape, especially under the time restriction of one month for edible supplies. Many possibilities were left undiscussed as unthinkable for now. The two Enterprise officers returned to their ship thoroughly depressed.

The two Klingon representatives left the meeting quickly and quietly-unusual for the argumentative pair. From the gathering hall they went straight to Koloth's cabin rather than the bridge, again unusal behavior.

"Well, Korax," Captain Koloth began with a vulpine smile, "the Enterprise will be the agent of its own destruction. Poetic justice, as the Earthers would put it."
Korax shared the conspiratorial and predatory grin.

"You know what we need to get the phaser bank working. Tell our allies what to request--don't have any one agent ask for too much to arouse suspicion," Koloth instructed.

"What if someone won't cooperate?"

"Simply point out that someone in their crew will, if necessary, by the blade."

Korax nodded and his grin grew wider.

"I tell you when I knew it was the Enterprise approaching the group, I almost wept with frustration. I almost wished for one of those obnoxious yermin called tribbles to stuff down Kirk's throat before I blew him to oblivion." Koloth's balled fists clenched spasmodically. "He has made fools of the pride of the Klingon fleet far too often to live."

"What of the cooperation pact enforced by the Romulan Commander?" Korax

said in a tone which implied "bitch."

"She has sold out to the peace mongers."

"She could be trouble."

"Make sure the phaser bank restored is one that could eliminate both yessels easily. Then we can take what we want and extend our survival period to years rather than days."

Korax laughed outright. "It is a pleasure to serve you, Captain. We think

much alike."

Koloth shot him a suspicious glance, but Korax' eyes were guarded. "See to it the plan is carried out."

"I hear and obey," Korax returned with the Klingon salute.

After Korax left, Koloth spent some minutes with his own thoughts before returning to his command post. "James Kirk, what a pleasure to see you and an even greater pleasure to see you no more. And Korax, you are useful but too ambitious for your own good." He was still smiling as he left his cabin.

IVX

There was one major obstacle, Spock decided: communication. And a large number of smaller obstacles. Since they were constantly observed he could not even whisper to his fellow prisoners without arousing suspicion. There were no writing materials. It could take forever to work out a clandestine code and make it generally known--they did not have forever. Supplies were bound to run short, so at best he had a year, at worst--two weeks. But, Vulcans were limited telepaths and the best he could come up with was developing his ability. He knew he could send and receive; he could not let himself think about the tremendous cost to him in physical and mental terms.

Spock settled on the floor facing the back of his cell and concentrated on clearing his mind and reaching out to Tal. For agonizing minutes there was no response. //Think to me; think to me,// Spock projected. Finally he caught the faintest inaudible response: //Yes, I hear you.// He continued desperately: //To escape. I stay; Reeves in.// Tal returned: //How? Scans.// He was right. Spock broke his concentration; he was drenched in a cold sweat and trembling violently. He almost groaned in frustration at his own limitations. The again

he felt a ripple on his thoughts.

//Foolish one,// the silent voice said, //You plan escape?// //Yes, if we can get Reeves in during meal change while I stay out.//

```
//If we could tell the others to get to the shuttle quietly, we could leave
the ship and negate the transferral process bringing the other vessels back.//
     //Some aliens would remain.//
     //Not enough to cause harm.//
     A pause ensued, then: //we could tell others.//
     //Could you convince Reeves to ignore me when he comes in for the lunch
shift?//
     //That is unknown; the arena is shielded against our thoughts.//
     //Why?// Spock thought with an incredulous rise of one eyebrow.
     //Because our thoughts can destroy.//
     For an instant all the Vulcan's senses were slammed with a phenomenal
overload. He gasped in shock and it was gone again, whatever assaulted him, as
if it had never happened. //How could you with your power be captured?//
     //Pollux was shielded.//
     //Could you reach Reeves through the security screen?//
     //We have tried and failed.//
     //Would the shield block my thoughts?//
     //Unknown.//
     //We must make the attempt and there will be no chance for a test,// Spock
thought to the telepaths. //There is no logic in this; I can only hope that
I can get through.//
    //Understood.//
    //Let the others know we will try tomorrow.//
    //Agreed.//
```

Spock turned to face the arena and watched as the occupants became aware of the proceedings. Fortunately, they were astute enough to be discrete, but a surreptitious glance, a turning in his direction told him the message was getting

through.

This day seemed especially long to the Vulcan. His usual method of passing time by working problems in higher mathematics was impossible; he could not concentrate long enough. He tried chess problems and again failed. All he could do was rehearse again and again the escape procedure. They all had to get to the shuttle known to be on board. The Ibis had little weaponry, but if the shuttle would be hit and destroyed their ships would still be returned. There could be no surrender and Spock suspected each of his fellow captives understood that. Would any of them betray the plan to save his life? He doubted it, since it would only delay the demise, but he could not be sure.

Suddenly he realized he could not leave the Ibis here. If any inimical power obtained the equipment, they could carry out the same scheme even though there was a different motivation. As long as it existed, it would be a temptation. Spock then revised his plans. He would have to return to the transmitter room and somehow destroy it--completely. The thought of casting his own life away in the process was not palatable, even though the probablity was uncomfortably high. From any angle, however, the possible sacrifice appeared worthwhile, not only for

the Enterprise and her crew, but also for future ships.

The decision made still did not move the time along with any greater speed, but now Spock could savor every breath, every memory. During the rest period he could not sleep, although he was careful to give the appearance. This time he could compute probabilities, and he liked none of his answers.

The next day the captives were tense, or perhaps it was a perception colored by the mood of the observer. Spock felt himself a runner on a course laid out by Zeno himself, but at last Reeves came in with the meal for the first group. Everyone tried to behave as usual, talking normally about the usual trivia and eating

in the normal way. The buzzer sounded for the end of the meal period and everyone headed back for their cells except Spock. He pressed himself up against the wall on the left side of the door. Reeves always came in and turned to the right to reactivate the force fields. Spock saw the two black robed figures facing the door in readiness. He concentrated on projecting the image of all being as it should be. The seconds ticked away. Finally the door opened. Spock hugged the wall more tightly. Reeves stepped through and turned right. The Vulcan felt a wave of dizzy relief pass over him but he quickly stepped behind Reeves and pressed the vulnerable nerve bundle in the neck region with precision. Reeves slumped, but Spock caught him and the gun before they could clatter to the deck. He laid the unconscious man carefully away from the door and then hit the switches cutting the force fields.

Motioning for silence he opened the outside door and stepped through. By prior agreement the black robed ones were the first to follow Spock out. Their minds sought out and broadcast the sensory overload to Pollux. On the bridge the Thovian, caught unawares, stumbled to a locker which he opened and from which he removed a helmet-like device. Donning it, he sank to the floor, unconscious.

The dark ones signalled for the rest of the captives to follow, who did so quietly. Spock pointed down the corridor to the shuttle bay. He stopped at a row of lockers and grabbed an environmental suit.

"What are you doing?" Shrev whispered.

"I have to remove this ship from our universe," Spock replied determinedly. "Wait five minutes and then launch if I have not returned."

"Then what?" Tal queried now.

"I'll try to get out for you to retrieve me."

"If you don't?"

"I will be dead and my task will or will not be accomplished, but the Enterprise will be safe," he answered calmly. "How do we locate you?" asked Tal.

"I will use the suit radio; please stay reasonably close."

"It is suicide, but good luck," Shrev said at last.

"Help me with one thing first," Spock asked. "I need to learn the operation of the transferral equipment."

"I don't think anyone will tell you that voluntarily," Tal pointed out.

"True, but I can use a mind touch to learn what I need."

The companions returned to the arena. Reeves was still sprawled unconscious where Spock had laid him. The Romulan and the Andorian pinned the human between them while Spock prepared himself to probe Reeves' mind. Spock disliked intensely the thought of violating the privacy of another mind by his intrusion without permission, but forced himself to take a pragmatic view. He went into deep concentration and turned to the now immobile human. He spread his hands over both sides of Reeves' face and touched the nerve points he was seeking. Reeves, even unconscious, resisted the touch, but was not strong enough to successfully block or divert it. Spock was repulsed by the disorder and perversion of the human's mind. Physical revulsion almost forced him to give up his pursuit of knowledge, but he persisted. Reeves did not know everything about the operations of the equipment, but he knew enough to give Spock the clues he needed. Spock broke the contact with relief and indicated to the others that they could release the man.

Shrev and Tal hurried to the waiting shuttle while Spock headed for the equipment room. To increase his chances Spock stopped at the weapons rack and withdrew a phaser before proceeding. There was no sign of anyone and he slipped into the chamber quietly; the consoles surrounded him darkly. He tried to remember where Reeves had stood when he had worked the controls. He studied each console carefully as the seconds fled; he would not have another chance. One of

the boards was labeled in Federation symbols and this, Spock decided from the information Reeves had supplied, must be the one which the human had manned, the actual transferral device. The next console had an identical but unlabeled set of controls; what other reason but to be the mechanism governing the transference

of the ship itself.

Spock noted that there was a timing device and a delay timer. Carefully he set the timer for ten minutes, ample time to allow his escape, and activated the controls. He turned his phaser on high gain and beamed the slab with its metal bands and the console marked with Federation symbols. Both burst into a satisfying show of sparks which continued to flash through relays and printed circuitry. Focusing the beam to a narrow pencil he fused the controls but left the equipment of the other console functional. He checked the time. The shuttle should have launched by now. Again he surveyed his activities with satisfaction. He slipped out of the room and moved swiftly toward the shuttle bay.

Spock did not see the trailing shadow.

XVII

Again there was a nagging suspicion in the back of Stevers' mind. She and Scott had just finished the distribution of engineering and energy supplies to the stranded vessels. At least power would not be a factor in the demise of any ship. But what would an Orion want with a $K-\bar{1}2$ switch? Well, there was one way to find out.

"Scotty, what would an Orion trader do with a K-12 switch? If I remember

correctly, their power train wouldn't require one."

"Eh, lass?" Scotty looked up from his inventory readout as he secured the rest of the supplies by remote control. "I dinna know, and you're right. It's

usually used in phaser banks."

The nagging suddenly became incessant. "Scotty, what would happen to the *Enterprise* if you had to power down completely. What systems could be reenergized without damage after a long period but which would require some minor repairs?"

"Well, everything would be in operating order except weaponry. That's nae so durable. I guess the designers figured a long power down would mean capture and they'd nae want to put instant destruction in the hands o' the captors."

"Would the Klingons do the same?"

"Nae telling what those beasties will do."

"Scotty, can you display the supply requests of known Klingon allies?" Her palms were sweating and cold and she was beginning to feel light-headed.

They both hovered over the readout screen as Scott gave the voice command and the screen blinked the phosphorescent green symbols in answer to the question.

"My God!" Scott gasped, "Half of them can be used in reenergizing phaser

Stevers went white and hit the intercom. "Captain, Jim, get us out of here now," she shouted. The Klingons have phasers!"

Koloth sat in his command chair in smug anticipation. "Are the repairs complete?"

"They are now," Korax responded. "Energizing."

"You know the targets. Fire on my command."

"Ready when you are, Captain."

"Give me a signal to the *Enterprise*. I want the pleasure of seeing James Kirk for the last time."

The screen cleared to show the captain of the *Enterprise* in his command chair. His look was one of concern. "Captain Koloth, what may I do for you?" he said

evenly. Before he heard the response, he was distracted by the communications officer. A look of startlement crossed his face and clearly over the connection

Koloth could hear the phrase "The Klingons have phasers!"

"Say goodbye, Captain," Koloth grinned wolfishly. "Fire!" he ordered Korax. But as his second reached out to obey the order the interior of the ship seemed to slur and blur. There was a wrenching vertigious sensation as if a high speed spin were suddenly stopped. Personnel not firmly in their seats were thrown to the deck. Several lost consciousness and the new adjutant became ill. When the viewscreen cleared the stars were different, closer, noticed Koloth absently. He, at least, was among those to hold on to his seat.

"Full scan," he shouted.

Korax scrambled madly into the navigator's chair and worked the controls. The armada was gone and with it the *Enterprise*. Koloth began to swear and even Korax was shocked at the breadth and depth of his commander's anatomical reference.

Kirk felt the hard cool deck under his cheek, blinked, and realized he was not dead. He thought he had experienced the series of unpleasant sensations before, however. Resuming his command chair gingerly, careful of a new collection of bruises, he looked up at the screen and almost let out a whoop of joy. The stars, his stars, were back. Space was wonderfully hot and crowded. Scanning the bridge he saw that everyone was back at their stations and not for the first time felt pride in his crew.

"Uhura, contact Starfleet Command. Tell them that we are home."

"With pleasure, sir!"

The intercom crackled. "What is going on here," McCoy's voice demanded. "In two minutes you give me a week's worth of abrasions and contusions, several concussions and a broken wrist."

"Bones, we're home," Kirk said simply.

After a second's silence McCoy returned, "Praise be."

Down in Engineering there was little joy. Scott had held his seat but the transition had flung Stevers across the room. Now she lay still and ashen, her pulse thready and breathing shallow. After checking her over, Scott ran to the intercom.

"Dr. McCoy, get a stretcher team to Engineering on the double! Commander Stevers is badly injured."

The med team took exactly two minutes, but Scott would have sworn it was hours. The good doctor was most fearful of a spinal injury but the diagnostic table

revealed that all her bones were intact except her skull, which had a hairline fracture at the right temple. If the swelling was minimal, complete and rapid recovery was certain. The captain paid a short visit to Sickbay to get the prognosis and hold the patient's hand briefly. Bones had managed to busy himself and Christine elsewhere for that time. But sentiment had to get short shift over duty. They had to get to the nearest star base for supplies quickly, and hopefully learn the whereabouts of the rest of the armada.

Back on the bridge the captain settled into his familiar role with gratitude. The improved morale of the crew was palpable. The command chair never felt so good and the stars were beautiful.

"Mr. Sulu, have you determined where we are?"

"Yes, sir, we are in quadrant 824.6 at 3 degrees above the galactic plane. The nearest starbase is Star Base VI."

Oh, brother, Kirk thought; that is the last place I want to go to, but we do

need to supply the ship.

"Very well, Mr. Sulu, lay in a course for Star Base VI. Lieutenant Uhura, contact the base and request supplies be made ready on our arrival to restock the *Enterprise*."

"Yes, sir." Uhura worked her control board. A frown drew her finely arched brows together. "Sir," she began in a puzzled tone, "I am picking up some kind of distress signal." She tapped her earphone impatiently. "Very faint signal."

"Can you triangulate on that?"

"Yes, sir, just a minute." Uhura worked some other equipment on her board then reported, "The signal is coming from ten degrees off starboard. Whatever it is, is coming closer." She frowned again in concentration. "And he reports he is on the *Ibis* shuttle."

For a second Kirk could not place the name of the ship, and then the implications hit him full force. "Mr. Sulu, set an intercept course with the shuttle.

Uhura, let the shuttle know we are on our way for pick up."

It took nearly thirty minutes for the *Enterprise* and the smaller craft to meet, and Kirk felt his own tension mount unbearably. He decided it was easiest to dock the craft in his ship's own shuttle bay. Now he was at the interior door with McCoy and several security men waiting for the bay to pressurize.

McCoy came directly to the point of Kirk's special anxiety. "You don't

suppose Spock is with them?"

"Well, we'll know soon enough; the bay is pressurized."

They were through the door preceded by the security men. The shuttle itself was fascinating, a design unlike anything in the Federation, rather like an inverted bowl. A panel slid aside on the surface facing the *Enterprise* men and the occupants began to file out, a collection of representatives from all over the galaxy. A Romulan and an Andorian stepped forward.

"Captain Kirk, I am Subcommander Tal, as you may remember, and this is Shrev of Andor. Excuse us if we all choose to leave the craft. It was quite crowded with nineteen beings aboard for over three hours--some of which are quite large

and others argumentative," he said with a slow smile.

Kirk could not see Spock in the group. "You said you came from the *Ibis*..."

"And you have just returned from the other universe," Shrev interrupted.

"All is righted. The *Ibis* has been sent back. There was some damage we saw at the last. The threat is surely removed."

"We are assured with your presence that the other vessels are safe. Spock

was from your ship and you are here," Tal continued.

"Spock, where is he?" Kirk asked tightly.

"He remained behind to complete the plan," Shrev said gently. It was clear this being was Spock's friend and cared greatly.

"Then he is..."

"Gone," Tal concluded.

Jim was stunned. So close. So close. He was dimly aware of McCoy moving closer to him, not touching or being obvious, just there, and he was grateful.

"Spock was in an environmental suit; he was supposed to join us after he sabotaged the equipment. We waited for his radio message even after there was an explosion, and the *Ibis* disappeared—nothing. He may have escaped in time and his transmitter might have been damaged," Tal said lamely, indicating he did not think much of that possibility.

"The suit holds six hours of air and it has been just over three hours since

we launched," Shrev added hopefully.

Kirk shrugged, gathering his thoughts to the present. "We are on our way to Star Base VI and will glad to drop you there so that you can arrange transportation to your home worlds. The security men will show you to your quarters. If there is anything you need, just let them know."

The shuttle's occupants acknowledged his message collectively and filed out of the bay; Tal was the last. Before he left he turned to the captain and said,

"Spock was not a willing passenger."

"Thank you," Kirk responded. So that was to be his friend's epitaph, he thought and yet it was strangely suitable. He went to the intercom.

"Mr. Sulu, see if you can backtrack the shuttle's path, and do a sensor

scan along the way."

"Yes, sir. What am I looking for?"

"A Vulcan in an environmental suit." McCoy looked at him quizzically.

"Yes, sir," Sulu responded briskly.

"That's pretty far fetched, don't you think?" McCoy asked.

"I can't give up just yet, Bones."

"Jim..."

"Spock would do it, has done it, for me."

"Okay, we should know in three hours. I guess we owe him that."

"He was so close," Kirk whispered hoarsely.

XVIII

Spock made his way quickly through the corridor to the shuttle bay, the controls set and the return past the point of reversal. With luck the shuttle would be gone; with more luck he would be able to leave the ship in his environmental suit. To save time and facilitate a quick exit he had already sealed and engaged the suit. He was grateful the boots were padded. The last bit of luck he needed was that which would help him meet up with the shuttle in open space and not get caught in the backwash of the transferrence. He did not wait to compute the probability of the entire sequence. He would play it out as best he could, but he knew with satisfaction that the probability was very high that the *Enterprise* would return safely. That was more than adequate compensation for the risks and his life.

He reached the personnel entrance to the shuttle bay and was about to palm the security lock when he realized with a sinking sensation that his luck had run very short.

"Stop where you are," came a ragged voice behind him. Spock swung to face

Pollux and a phaser set on maximum.

"You meddler! You have destroyed it all. You have condemned my universe to death!" Pollux raged. "How dare you!" His face was drained of color so that even a welt on his forehead was pale.

"You would dare to destroy the social order of my universe," Spock observed calmly as he imperceptibly edged closer to the door.

"My people, my life," Pollux moaned brokenly.

"Perhaps you could find another way."

"We poured all our remaining resources into this effort, even to hastening the demise. There is not enough left to try again. There is not enough time." He was on the edge of hysteria and Spock could see the fingers of the hand holding the phaser twitch uncontrollably.

"You scum have destroyed us! You are only fit for slaves, all of your kind!" Pollux's face was livid now. Spock was only centimeters from the door. He slid the hand nearest the lock, his left, up his back millimeter by torturous milli-

meter.

Suddenly a figure that made Pollux appear rational and reasonable staggered into view carrying a phaser rifle. "So that's what you think of me, you bastard!" Reeves screamed.

Pollux's attention being distracted for an instant was the cue Spock needed to blur into action. He hit the lock and dove through the door before it had even completely opened. Scrambling in a broken pattern he dashed for the only cover available, some crates by the far wall. Pollux leaped after him and fired his phaser wildly, scorching the ceiling, floor and wall near Spock. The Vulcan realized with dismay that the controls for the bay doors were on the opposite

wall and that both Pollux and Reeves were between him and them. His two antagonists were slowly closing in on him. He tried to keep the crates between them and him, delaying as long as possible.

Reeves broke into view and Spock froze, prepared for the final blast. Reeves

was too close to avoid, yet too far to try a hand to hand attack himself.

"You've got him!" Pollux shouted triumphantly.

Reeves, at the last possible second, swung the rifle toward Pollux, firing.

"Die, bastard!" he shouted.

The charge cut the captain in half and tore through the shuttle door to deep space, leaving a gaping hole and creating explosive decompression. The crates, Spock, the body and Reeves were expelled through the hole, shot out with the escaping atmosphere like air from a balloon. Reeves' agony as the gases and liquids in his system expanded and ruptured their containers was a gruesome sight. Spock had banged into the edges of the hole but his suit maintained its integrity. He faced the ship and watched mesmerized as its outline wavered, blinked, and vanished, sucking some of the near debris and Pollux's body to wherever with it.

Spock called on his full control to prevent hyperventilation and spinning in the vacuum of space. He extended his arms and legs carefully, turning slowly to survey his quadrant of space. He could not see the shuttle. Abruptly, he felt insignificant and utterly isolated.

His morbid anxiety was broken by static and a voice.

"Shuttle to Spock, shuttle to Spock, come in. This is Commander Tal."

"I am here," Spock responded as he hit the transmit switch. "I will begin a homing beacon."

"Shuttle to Spock, come in please. The Ibis has disappeared. Did you

escape?"

"I am here!" Spock said in a raised voice. "Come in."

"Give up, Tal," a disembodied voice said in the background. "He went with the *Ibis*. Why don't you see if you can get us out of here."

Spock desperately sought to contact the minds of the black robed aliens,

but there was only mental silence.

After another moment's hesitation Tal whispered in final farewell, "Ave atque vale, Spock," and switched the subspace radio to shipping bands. The shuttle may have been equipped with sensors but they were of an unfamiliar design, and no one could have interpreted the information. Their search for a rescue would have to be visual or by radio. Tal switched on what he determined by experimentation to be the automatic mayday beacon and pointed the shuttle on a trajectory toward the center of the galaxy; he was thankful just to be alive, at least for now.

Spock watched the shuttle execute its turn, since he could make out the ion trail.

Alone.

Alone in the void of space. Spock knew his transmitter had malfunctioned, probably damaged when he was blown out of the *Ibis*. His alternatives were severely limited, his options including only the time of his death. He had been so close that he almost been converted to a belief in human luck. Safe from observation he groaned in despair. Then he came to himself and realized the Vulcan way was one of realistic optimism. To give in to despair went against his whole life; nor could he come to a quick end by his own hand. He would continue his life until it could no longer continue. Checking the atmosphere gauges he found he had a maximum of six hours if he remained conscious at minimum respiration. Unconscious, it would be longer, but useless. Spock decided Vulcan honor did not require that. He slowed his metabolism consciously to minimum alert life maintenance and considered the course of his final thoughts.



Jim, I wish I could say goodbye and thank you for your friendship. I have learned much of caring for another through you. I am here, he projected his thoughts to open space. Friend.

He meditated on the meaning of the word <code>friend</code>, which even his father understood. The concern, the acceptance, the give and take, the support. He had not known the full meaning of the word until he had met Jim. Spock had missed Captain Pike, who was a good, efficient officer. He respected Pike and his fellow officers and they respected his ability, but their foibles were most grating and mostly he shunned their company. He buried himself in work on the bridge or in the lab, journals during his recreation periods and his longing for Vulcan when in his cabin.

Jim had bounded onto the bridge that first day with naked joy written on his face. He almost caressed the command chair. He had surveyed the bridge and had noticed his Vulcan science officer as one of the few holdovers from the old bridge crew.

"Mr. Spock," he had said, "I need a new first officer. Whom would you recommend?"

"That is not in the area of my competence," Spock had replied formally. "That's an order, mister," Kirk responded with a twinkle in his eye.

"Very well. I believe Lieutenant Commander Montgomery Scott is senior on this vessel."

Kirk shook his head. "We need him where he is, with his true love."
"Lieutenant Commander Attabat of Security," he had then suggested.
"Not anough command training an approximate with the second "

"Not enough command training or experience with the vessel."

"I can think of no one else aboard."

"That is illogical, Mr. Spock," ${\sf Jim}$ had said with the corners of his mouth twitching.

"Sir!" he had responded with an eyebrow on the rise, only to feel ashamed to be goaded into reaction.

"Know thyself, Commander Spock!"

Both eyebrows had shot up then at the field promotion and the implied offer. "I would prefer you continue as science officer and also take on the duties of first officer. There would be a great deal of additional work, but you have both the knowledge of the ship and the command training. Will you accept the position?" Jim explained.

"Why?" had been his ambiguous response, but Kirk had not misread him.
"I need a cool head I can depend on when I am not," he had responded

openly, honestly.

They barely knew each other then, but the friendship had started there and grew and broke through his formality, but still allowed his reserve.

Jim.

McCoy had been harder. He had elected himself Spock's savior from his Vulcan repression. His initial antagonism toward McCoy did not deter the good doctor—he only tried harder. Gradually Spock had realized that their exchanges were an excellent outlet for his wit. He was never quite sure if Bones knew he was helping him develop his sense of humor, and ability to see his own fallibil—ities in perspective. McCoy was a psychologist—he must know. He would miss the verbal sparring as much as McCoy would. Bones. He would and did vouch for the good doctor's behavior with his life and now he would give his life. Maybe Bones had succeeded as his savior. He cared; he ached to see the people of the Enterprise again. Leonard.

The others, Sulu, Scott, Uhura, dark lady of the beautiful voice, Chekov and Christine who loved him without hope of return. Christine, maybe the next pon farr could have been our time. You were not unattractive. I counted you my

friend, too. More was not possible.

The time drifted with his thoughts. He rotated very slowly through space. He was almost out of time. One of the stars was moving—he must be hallucinating already from oxygen deprivation. The star grew larger, but not brighter. Too late, Spock thought, too far for sensors...a speck on the beach, no time...so close...but at least I know they are safe...Jim...Bones...Christine...alone...

XIX

The shuttle passengers had been provided for and were settled. The captain assigned a security team and one from engineering to learn what was possible from the craft itself. To have Spock so close and to lose his friend again was almost more than Kirk could bear. He went to his cabin and sat at the log recorder. Despondently, he turned it on.

Captain's Log Stardate 7182.4: For the record let it read that former Starfleet Commander Spock has effected a rescue of 19 beings from the alien Thovian ship thus returning their vessels from an alternate universe. He did this at great risk to himself and gave his life in service to the Federation.

It proved impossible to continue. His vision blurred and he could almost

hear Spock calling to him.

"Jim." The word reverberated in Kirk's mind with overtones of regret and

resignation.

The six hours were up. He found he could not stay in his cabin so he lurched to his feet and headed toward Sickbay. Maybe McCoy's friendly counsel or at least his Saurian brandy would help blunt the pain. Before he left he called the bridge and ordered Mr. Sulu back on course for Star Base VI.

As he walked into Sickbay he almost smiled. Jerry was sitting up in bed

sipping a cup of soup.

"How do you feel?" he asked solicitously.

"I have one whale of a headache, but other than that, okay."

"She still carries a chip on her shoulders," McCoy grinned, "her head. Must be solid granite."

Stevers and Kirk groaned in unison.

"Seriously," she said, "I am sorry to hear about Spock. There are always possibilities. But if he did escape...I was in his position and nearly lost my mind. The loneliness can be overwhelming."

"Spock won't have the comfort of losing contact with reality," McCoy said. "He'll hang on to the very end. Funny, I almost thought I heard him call me.

Like it was in my head."

Kirk's head snapped up and Christine Chapel in the next room dropped a tray of instruments.

"I felt he was calling me too," Jim admitted.

Chapel, looking visibly shaken, came to the door. "Then it is true, he's alive!"

"I know you want desperately for that to be true, Christine," McCoy began. She shook her head. "I hear him call me. And he is closer now. I can feel it."

"But we scannned for him," Kirk said.

"Are you still looking?" she demanded.

"Well, there seems to be little reason."

"Please, captain, try again," she begged. Then she closed her eyes and relaxed as if concentrating on an inner voice. Pointing, she said, "Aim your sensors that way."

McCoy looked startled. "Yes," he said in confirmation.

"Are you sure?" Kirk asked the medical officers.

"Captain, what have you got to lose?" Chapel argued.

Kirk went to the intercom and ordered Sulu to continue the sensor search in

the quadrant Nurse Chapel indicated. Five minutes later the intercom beeped for attention.

"Captain, I almost missed it," Sulu exclaimed. "Life readings are really boarderline; it could be instrument error, but the mass is about right."

"Give the coordinates to the Transporter Room and hurry. Tell them I'm

on my way."

McCoy and Chapel were already out the door. Kirk made the Transporter Room at a dead run. Lieutenant Rhad was adjusting the controls and hit the switch. A man-sized column of phosphoring particles sparkled at one of the stations. It solidified gradually and collapsed in a heap on the platform! Spock.

McCoy, Chapel and Kirk reached the prone form simultaneously. McCoy pressured in a high oxygenator compound as Kirk worked at removing the helmet. Spock's face was grey and his lips colorless. Chapel touched his cheek; it was cold. Tears were streaming down her own face as she tried to find a pulse.

"Doctor---" Christine began, choking back a sob.

"Damn it, Bones, do something," Kirk roared.

McCoy's face was drawn in concentration as he passed his diagnostic instrument over Spock's body. "Shut up, I'm trying to concentrate," he snapped. He stopped at one particular point, mid-thorax, frowned, waiting; then he looked up. "Bones!" Kirk demanded.

"He's going to make it!" McCoy said with a jubilant smile. Chapel wobbled

on her knees in relief and even the captain felt a wave of weakness.

"Spock seems to have used some kind of metablic control that cut his oxygen consumption way down," McCoy explained. "He'll need some time in Sickbay to come out of it, but he'll be fine."

Already the Vulcan's color had improved and respiration was apparent. Kirk elected to carry his friend the short distance to Sickbay rather than wait for a stretcher and McCoy did not have the heart to object. Kirk laid Spock gently on the bed next to Stevers.

"Well," he quipped, "I now have two first officers and they are both out

of commission." His joy was overwhelming.

XX

James T. Kirk sat at Spock's side through the two hours it took for the Vulcan to regain consciousness. Stevers wondered at the depth of their friendship and hoped that she too would be fortunate enough to experience such a relationship. She studied the Vulcan in his repose and he did not seem any more remarkable than any other Vulcan she had ever encountered. Chapel hovered in Sickbay like a quiet shadow, trying to be unobtrusive. Even McCoy fussed around Spock's bed checking readings and instruments. He had to be quite a person to inspire such concern and care in others, Stevers sighed. From what she had had the opportunity to observe, these people of the *Enterprise* were worth Spock's devotion and by their attitude it was clear that he was valued by them.

The Vulcan's eyelids flickered, then opened. Spock's face relaxed and the corners of his mouth twitched. His friends drew around him; it was good to be

home. He started to sit up.

"Now just a cotton-pickin' minute, here," McCoy blustered, "no one said you could get up."

"Why, Doctor, I did not realize the hands of a clock were functional," Spock retorted drolly.

Kirk choked with laughter. "Welcome home."

"Thank you, Jim."

"Now if Christine hadn't convinced us to keep looking, you would be a Spock of inanimate matter by now," McCoy broke in.

Kirk looked pained. "Bones, you must have spend two hours dreaming that up." "I did," he admitted.

"I heard you call, we all did," Christine said seriously.

"I am grateful you listened, Christine," the Vulcan replied. Everyone heard the less formal mode of address.

"By the way, this is Commander Jerry Stevers," Kirk said by way of introducing the occupant of the next bed. "She was injured in transit back."

Spock nodded acknowledgement.

Stevers gave the Vulcan salute. "Live long and prosper, Spock." And he returned it with a quizzical raise of his eyebrows. "I went to school on Vulcan," she explained.

"You were fortunate."

"Yes, the education was excellent," she agreed.

"Spock, we'll be orbiting Star Base VI in a few hours," Kirk pointed out.
"We will find the best lawyers and break your court martial. Surely the Federation can be made to see that it was illogical."

"That will not be necessary," the Vulcan said evenly, to a collective gasp. "You see, I could not be court martialed for disobedience when I was under orders to disobey."

"You were under orders? Whose?" Kirk said incredulously.

Spock nodded. "Commodore Harker had determined I needed to be a free agent." "Then the court martial was a set-up. Why couldn't you have told me?"

Kirk asked in a hurt tone.

"Captain--Jim, we were not sure of security and who might overhear. I asked the commodore to let me tell you, but he insisted that we do it according to his plan."

"But why this plan in the first place?" McCoy asked.

"A computer programmer at Federation Central Headquarters had noticed a pattern to the disappearance of ships. First a crewmember would be left off, then the ship would be gone. This also correlated with the Romulan and Klingon information. I was chosen as bait for the *Enterprise*."

"And if you weren't successful?" McCoy continued.

Spock looked uncomfortable. "At least we would have learned that it was not the mode of operation."

"What if you were not picked up?"

"That is now an academic question, Doctor" he replied almost visibly squirming.

"Ah ha! And just what was the probability that this plan would work?" "About fifty percent," Spock mumbled.

"Well, I have lived to see the day, Jim. Spock gambled! He is really human after all!"

"I see no need for insult, Doctor," the Vulcan retorted.

"Spock, don't fight it," Jim said with a broad grin. "I have gone with slimmer chances and I would have bet on you no matter what the odds. I have a real problem now, however."

Everyone regarded him questioningly.

"The *Enterprise* now has two first officers in reality. Jerry took over your position."

"I do not also hold the science officer position," Jerry protested in defense of Spock's expertise.

"Considering the events of the last two weeks, this is a good problem to have," Kirk observed.

As if on cue, the intercom buzzed for attention.

"Kirk here."

"Priority message from Commodore Harker, Star Base VI, sir," Uhura's voice

informed him.

"Put it through here."

The screen cleared and reformed in Harker's craggy features.

"Commodore, what may I do for you?" Kirk began.

"Kirk, I have just been informed by your Lieutenant Uhura of the events of the past weeks. Welcome back."

"Thank you, sir, and I believe I owe you an apology for my behavior the

last time you were on board the Enterprise."

"It was entirely understandable," Harker's rough voice mellowed. "Now I believe I can solve some of your additional problems."

Kirk said expectently, "Sir?"

"Yes, I have just had word from Admiral Comack that Captain Stevers is to take command of the scout ship *Soyuz* docked here at the base. She will also need to select a science officer."

"Isn't that one of the new XL ships?" Stevers broke in excitedly.

"Captain Stevers, I did not realize you were there." The fact of promotion

finally sank in as she sat up in stunned silence.

"Commodore, Lieutenant Commander Senek has been acting science officer on the *Enterprise*. If he were assigned to the *Soyuz*, it would be a good career move for him," Kirk explained blandly.

"Is that agreeable with you, Captain Stevers?" Harker inquired.

"What? Oh, yes indeed," Stevers replied.

"Commander Spock can, of course, resume his position as soon as he is certified fit for duty."

"Thank you, sir," Spock and Kirk responded together.

"I believe that takes care of the minor details. Kirk, once again, welcome back," Harker finished.

"It is a pleasure to be home," the captain responded. The screen faded.

McCoy finally broke the private reveries. "Well, Jerry, if you are going
to be ready to take command of the Soyuz I had better release you from Sickbay
immediately." Christine left and returned with a robe and shoes for Jerry.

"Uh, could I help you pack your gear, Captain?" Kirk asked, mock-serious.

"Are you in such a hurry to get rid of me?" she challenged.

"No, but I never had a chance to show you my etchings and I hope we can find some time before you leave." He grinned at her.

She smiled back as she slipped into the robe. "Seriographs, sir. I think we can make some time." Rising from the bed she said, "Lead on, Captain."

Spock followed the byplay and exit with a bemused expression. *Humans!*"Christine, I would be most grateful if you could bring me some plomik soup," he said seriously.

"Of course, Mr. Spock," she said, beaming on her way out.

This is a good time to make myself scarce, McCoy counseled himself. Christine deserves some privacy to gush over her Vulcan occasionally.

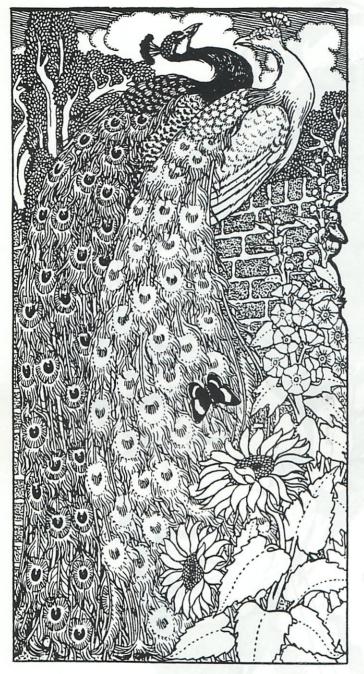
"Spock, I have a couple of hours of catch up work in Bio Lab 3 to do. If you need anything, you can reach me there," he said matter of factly.

"Thank you, Doctor," Spock replied formally but with an elevation of one

brow.

McCoy sauntered out, pleased with himself and his universe.





Mind Is I Join You?

Look at him! He thinks he's being such a goddamn stoic, hiding all the pain behind that command facade. It's not gonna be easy this time, prying underneath that tough hide he thinks he's made invincible. 'Pears as though this bout's gonna cost me that bottle of bourbon I've been saving for --well, I suppose I'll find something else for her; Jim's more important now. The drink doesn't really matter, it's only that it's become a -- tradition? --me appearing at his door, glasses and bottle in hand, giving him time to organize his thoughts, feelings, questions. He puts himself so far out in front, no wonder he gets lost sometimes. Don't worry, Captain, I won't let on that I still see a small, frightened boy, looking to the stars for an answer he must find within himself.

After all, I have unanswered questions, too. Who am I to deny you the same! I'm too scared to look backwards, as I've my own monsters chasing me through the night.

"Care to slay a few dragons together, Jim?"

-- Vel Jaeger





I feel you nearer now than you were when first I felt your need three days ago. And again, this day, I choose. I have the choice to control, to shut your feelings safely away from me, or to share them.

Tradition and propriety deem that I shut them away from my perception; it is logical that I remain in full command of my mind and senses. Logical. Is it logic that brings you to me in a barbaric flood of passion? Or that bids I wait like some senseless prey to be taken? Illogic, it seems, is permissible when named tradition--or need.

I was surprised when your father came to mine with the proposal that we be bonded. It is logical--a widow and a man divorced. The choice is limited for you, but I have no need but to carry on my family line--and even that will eventually become yours. I was surprised, but not displeased. My wishes were not consulted, no more than yours were, I suspect. But it was with interest and acceptance that I met your mind and became a part of you. The image of your face that day comes before my inner sight, wavering between the face of the man you are and the boy with whom I grew.

Alien. They called you alien--and you were. You are alien. More alien than if you were fully human. Humans we can know and predict; you--are different. You are a being unto yourself, and therefore uniquely alien. As we were growing, it was not the alienness that I saw, at least not the type that comes from blood, or genetics. It was the alienness of one not afraid to stand apart, not cut to match, and proud, somehow, to be the differing segment. And yet, there was that part of you that stood more Vulcan than the rest.

It was that Vulcan my mind met in the sand that day. It was that sone and esemil structure planted firmly in the raging swirl of your undisciplined mind, the softness beating itself painfully against the hardness. Human crushed against immovable Vulcan. It was frightening, like a wind eddy pulling at the mouth of a cavernous pit. And it was intriguing. It is unfathomable that you exist within in your own mind. And yet you do survive. You do function, as well as any. Now, in addition to what you already battle, there is this. If you can bear the torment of this time, how can I, then, not share in it?

Hours pass and it grows stronger, the tension, the panic, the rising pressure. Still, there is my choice. I still could choose to close it out--all but the knowledge of your need and the obedience to you. I could close out even the obedience, if I chose the challenge, and began to prepare for it now. not choose the challenge. And I do choose, against all that is "proper" and "acceptable", to ride the pain with you.

My mother is against it, as she was against our bonding. She is logical--as always. And, in essence, I must agree with her. There is no logical reason to choose to experience the time in any more than my physical body. I would be able to protect myself from the rage of your mind, to shut away the pain in my body, to allow you nothing but what is demanded of me by tradition. Why then do I continue to allow your pain to touch me? To allow your pressure to confine me to my room, my meditations and my solitude -- to await your coming? It is not logical.

Logic. I believe in it with all of my being. But I believe in nothing that imprisons my mind, or dictates what, by ancient law--unchanged--is my free choice. My mother says that I will regret my decision. That I cannot know what it is,

that I have never faced the time, seen the rage, known the madness and the fear. She is right in that--when Svotel died, I was but eleven. I survived a breaking-a tearing out of my inner world--that should have destroyed me. I lived, and I learned the lessons of consuming aloneness. I will not put that on you, my bond-mate. I will not leave you to the pain alone.

Still, you are days away, and I feel your struggle to remain calm. I am calm. Am I reaching you? Can I reach you? Or is it only the intensity of your burden that reaches to me? Courage. Peacefulness, Spock. Relax, my betrothed, the time shortens. Rest--and sleep.

My thoughts are full of you. When we were young, I watched you--wondering what things you thought, why you were so separate, even in being among us. (Your eyes are so liquid clear, Spock.) And when there was that haunting aloneness in you, I wanted to reach out to you. It was not logical. Was not then, and is not now. Perhaps I am not as logical as I might be. Perhaps...

...I'tath'a! We touch! By the mind-by all that is Vulcan!! I am afraid! I cannot! Pain! I am Vulcan-there is no--//Spock? Yes, I hear you! I cannot--

I--yes. I will--I am.//

I am calmed by his instructions--no--his orders. //Spock?// He is gone. How it must have strained him to send so far--for me. To have been ordered, and to crave to obey, to seek to be sheltered by another, how unlike me. And to obey, and find peace. All so new.

Though tolerable, it is still intense, the touching of the time--the invisible barrier of distance is spanned--and there will be no relief now, as there has been none for him. I will not allow the fear to overwhelm me again. I have chosen to

share. I will not be a burden to thee.

Pain. How can one shift from feeling no desire to feeling so much that it hurts? Procreation. Survival of the species. Pressure. Come, betrothed. Great white starship speed on the wings of Athotolis. Oh, pain...

Calm. I must be calm. I am the stronger of mind. I must impart peace to him, allow him to stand in dignity before the Elders, before T'Pau. Whole Vulcan.

Completed man.

"No, Mother. I want no food. Yes. I know--I know."

The water hurts. "No, Mother. I will not change my mind." Please, this once, be on my side...and stop your infernal reasoning. Can't you see how hard you make it? Head throbbing. Pressure in me pumping. "No, Mother. I wish no soft music." I wish only silence and an end to this hell. "Thank you, Mother. I could not have put it up myself." The hair off of my neck feels good. Strange garment. Stranger still this stupor. I feel so much from him that I am overwhelmed. The force of his blood pumping through me, my heart pounding. Oh, pain...And heat. I am so hot.

Father? "Yes, Father. Yes." It has been so long since I bent my head into your hands like this. Since...before my bonding with Svotel. Soothing touch. //Thank you, Father. Comfort to you, Father. Mind of my own, life of my life... You are... The words do not come. Know my heart. Know what you are to me, and what time and happenings cannot touch.//

He is there as I enter. He is beautiful! My--our--hearts pound at the nearness. Our minds are as wild equines, hooves flailing in the air at one another, heads tossing, teeth burying in flesh and hair.

//NO!//

It is he that commands our coming to reality. I was wrong. I am not the

stronger of mind. I am pure Vulcan, but I am not stronger. He commands our honor

and our dignity. And I obey.

The formalities take a millennium to pass--words to say, vows to be spoken, the TRIVIA of it all! Pass, Time! Pass and free us to one another! Once again, I feel his quelling and submit to it. Wetness gathers between my paired hands and runs down my wrists, my throat is parched, but I will not show that which is within me.

At last it is over, and I am presented to him. I am aching, my husband. Do not touch me; I will explode. Does he know? Has he heard? He does not touch me. Of course. It is shared desperation and pain. He strides away in the sand toward the Cave of Completion, and I follow. I feel the pressure in him--in us--building. He is no longer fighting it and we are feeding off of one another's lust and hunger as the cave's darkness invites us into its depths.

It is only logical to undress quickly, to say nothing. His mind is within mine fully; he has not asked, nor have I resisted. It is still the raging swirl of non-discipline, always alien, and now--voraciously hungry. It is all of me. No. I am not stronger of mind. His mind is undisciplined, as only it could be with its human influence, but it is strong and utilitarian--and very different.

His palm raises, his eyes dark haunted coals in dimness. I shudder as I feel the depth of his need to mate and lift my hand to his. It is hot and moist, unlike the usual dryness, the fever driving his body temperature past its usual heat. There is a blocking from him, and then a groan as he releases to the sensuality of our touch and allows the hunger to take him, his hand stroking mine. At his release the current hits me fully and it is all I can do not to pull away, but I am trapped. It is coursing too much sensation through me; there is too much of each of us that wants it to go on and on. It is a cacophony clanging, a vacuum drawing. Fear and sickness merge with throbbing and dizziness until we both feel the need to escape and fight it back.

//Why have you chosen this?// Defensiveness? Judgement? Or just rampant

curiousity? He is shaking.

//Suffice it to say that I have.// My answer is harsh, as defensive as his seemed.

We are losing (wanting to lose?) the battle for reason. Neither of us is sure of this, neither wants to surrender to it. His hand touches my face and the undertow is set. Our minds and bodies rise, as if by some predestined call, and join forces against will and control as his hands slide to my back.

//Yes, by the minds, yes!// That cannot be me. But it is. His body is moving, spasming, and hot hands burn down my buttocks and thighs. //Yes!//

His answer is only a growl as he lifts me about his hips and, spreading me, lowers me onto his body, a thrust forcefully taking him as we touch. I am flame!

Now, for the first time, there is an interim in which to rest. And to think. The days that have preceded have been painful, wearing, and in some ways that are totally and undeniably emotional--satisfying. We are bruised and dirty, matted and swollen with our activities. The hunger rages intermittantly inside with no seeming concern that the implements of consumption are but of flesh. Spock sleeps, and I do not doubt that he will waken soon, the hunger in him rising in my body as well. But for now, he is peaceful. For now, he rests, his head upon his arm, his mouth open slightly, his lashes fringed upon his cheek.

I do not regret my decision to share in the torment of this time with him, to fall witness to his madness, to be that madness with him. And as for his question,

'why?'; I do not know.

It is over. We kneel together at the mouth of the cave, knees together, balanced on feet, our bodies healing from those frantic first days. His eyes are

clear and unclouded, reflecting my face. He gives me a slight bow and puts his hands out to me, palms up, expecting, and receiving, my hands into his. "I am honored to have served thee, my husband."

The darkness in his eyes lights in the morning sun. "As thee chose, we

served one another."

I suddenly--untenably--cannot meet his eyes, and he reaches--in that totally alien way of his--to touch my face. And somehow it is no longer alien, but merely Spock, and valued as such. I feel the need to reach to him as well. It does not make sense, and I should not act upon it. There is no passion, no need in either of us, but the urging is there. I look into the clearness of his eyes and wonder. Have I become so bold that I would act from something that is not logical--not by intellect or by necessity? And yet, my arms, as if by their own will, lift and come around him. A rush of terrifying fullness sweeps me as he meets my embrace with his own and holds me hard against him. It is not his emotion that I feel inside. Our minds have been apart for hours now. It is my own strange churning. And if I bear this without becoming totally insane, it will be nothing short of a miracle. I do not believe in miracles--but it is subsiding now, growing more comfortable, and he continues to hold me close. At last it is ended and we sit back.

"Why did you choose to share the madness with me?" he asks, as if the touch-

ing had loosed some freedom in him.

I think. And still, I do not know. But I must answer, and as I speak, it comes to me. "I could not bear to see you alone. Even when you were bonded to T'Pring, she was not companion to you." Again, the fullness invades and I fight it back. At last it is contained and I speak--must speak the truth. "And I did not wish to be left behind. I could not bear not being a part of what was in you. It was an illogical reason, and as such, unworthy." My eyes cast down in shame. Again his hand touches my face, raising it.

"It would be illogical for the wife of a full Vulcan. It was not tradition. But it was wise for the wife of Spock, for $\it I$ am not in tradition. It took great courage to adapt to the situation, my wife --to live with the lack of emotional

discipline it posed."

He has located a source of discomfort. "I have been--" No. It is not right to put that upon him. But he interposes it, much to my surprise.

"Contaminated?"
"Forgive me. Yes."

Again, almost a smile --does he smile when he is with the humans, just as he is Vulcan when he is with us? His eyes soften and he reaches out to stroke my cheek with fingertips once again a little cooler than my face. "It will achieve its proper place, the emotion." His hand drops. "You are fatigued and you have been very close within my mind for many days." And then, he does smile! May reason keep me from reacting and offending him! He touches my face again, his eyes all seeing and forgiving. The smile flares and then is gone. "Emotion is not the fatal thing that it is deemed to be, only very dangerous. Once it is learned, it must be contained and hidden, but it can be managed. I regret that my influence on you requires you to experience it and therefore to control. I know of no way to shield you from it but to be totally impersonal. It is an innate part of me."

Relief is sudden. The logic of it touches my mind with a swiftness that causes wonder for the length of time it took to see. Diversity. I am Vulcan and I will be Vulcan, not by what I feel but by what I am and what I do. There is no shame in reaching to one who needs my touch. It does not invalidate me if I can feel another's need. It is my answer. It is the reason for my instinctual sharing with my bondmate. For this situation, and with this individual, it was logical. "I will value this exposure as a point of personal growth, my husband."

His face shows relief.

But that is not the end of the spectrum of responsibility for this one's needs and it echos in my being. I am his. And if his needs are to be met, completely met, I must find some of his alienness in myself to share with him. There is that space in him that I have seen in these last days, that needs to touch--caress.

Oh, bold Vulcan woman! Show your courage now!

I cannot!

You must. Let it be now or be forever lost to you--to him.

And in a rush of panic and against all logic and taboo I lean to him--what has been till now led by him, eased by the heat of the fever, becomes clumsy in my own efforts. I press my lips to his as I have felt him do to mine, and his arms come around me. His breath quickens and his mouth is hot and wet on mine, searching and--by the mind--finding, passion there.

He pulls me back onto the sand with him. We will mate one more time before we leave this place. And it will not be because of the Pon Farr, but because of the humanity in this alien bondmate, because of the ancient sexuality this brazen

Vulcan woman allows his human touch to incite in her.

His hands touch me, his mind firmly closed within himself, and in shock I feel again the quaking need to be one with him. In a very human fashion he urges me on, covers my body with his own and--at last--enters. And once again, I am flame. Total Vulcan. And totally consumed in the fire wrought by this man who is nothing if not alien.

Alien. I was attracted to it long years ago, and in this place in me that I have only now admitted. And I am still attracted to it. Looking at him resting beside me, I see myself for what $\mathcal I$ am as well: A rebel woman with my chosen granite god. He looks at me and I cannot conceal it longer, but reach to stroke his belly and to smile--cursed, forbidden smile that it is. "You are going to be the ruin of me, Human." There is that full feeling in me as I speak, and he hears it for he returns the slight smile.

"You are to be incorruptable, Vulcan. I am only a half-breed, not to be

trusted for control."

"Then we have a problem, my husband." Again I come into the shelter of his arms willingly. "We have a very large problem." And two slight smiles meet.

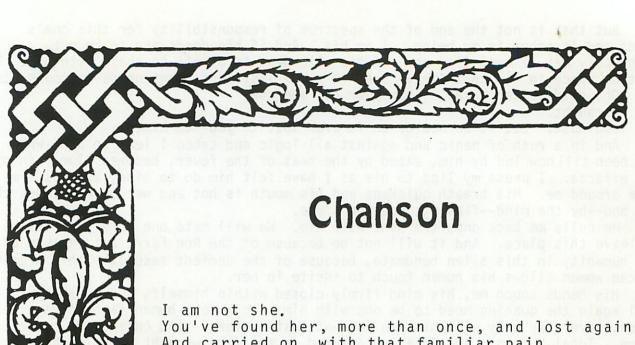
ななななななななな

...I love thee to the level of every day's Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning
Old Earth Dating 1806-61







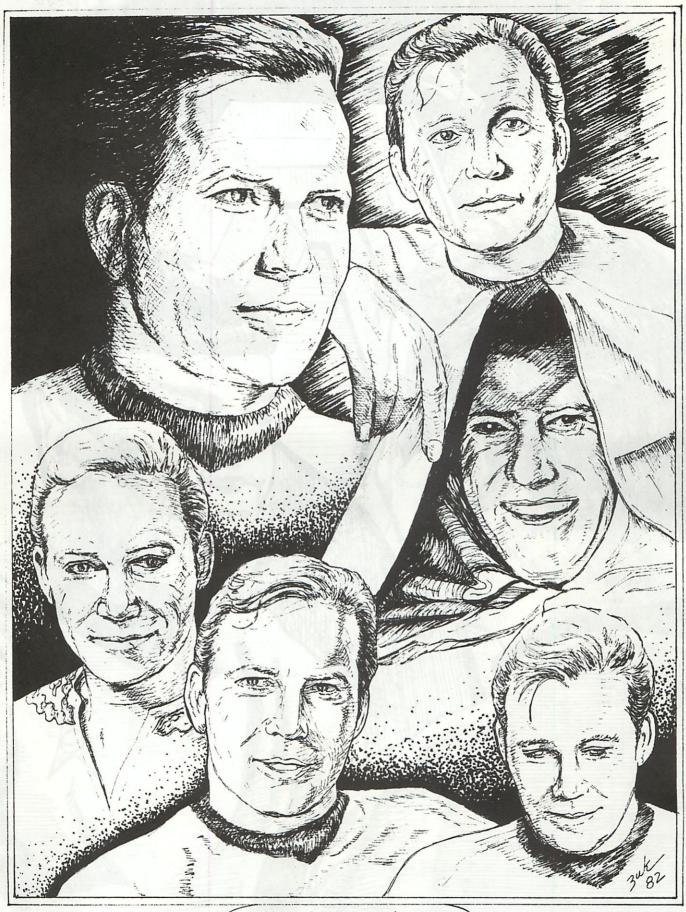
You've found her, more than once, and lost again, And carried on, with that familiar pain Accepted as a part of what must be.

I am not she, Lost deep in time, or lost to blood and stone, Or lost to choices too unkind to make. Yet, torn and sundered, wounded to the bone, You hand the universe your heart to break; Still strong enough to bear the hurt, and live, And willing, still, to turn again and give.

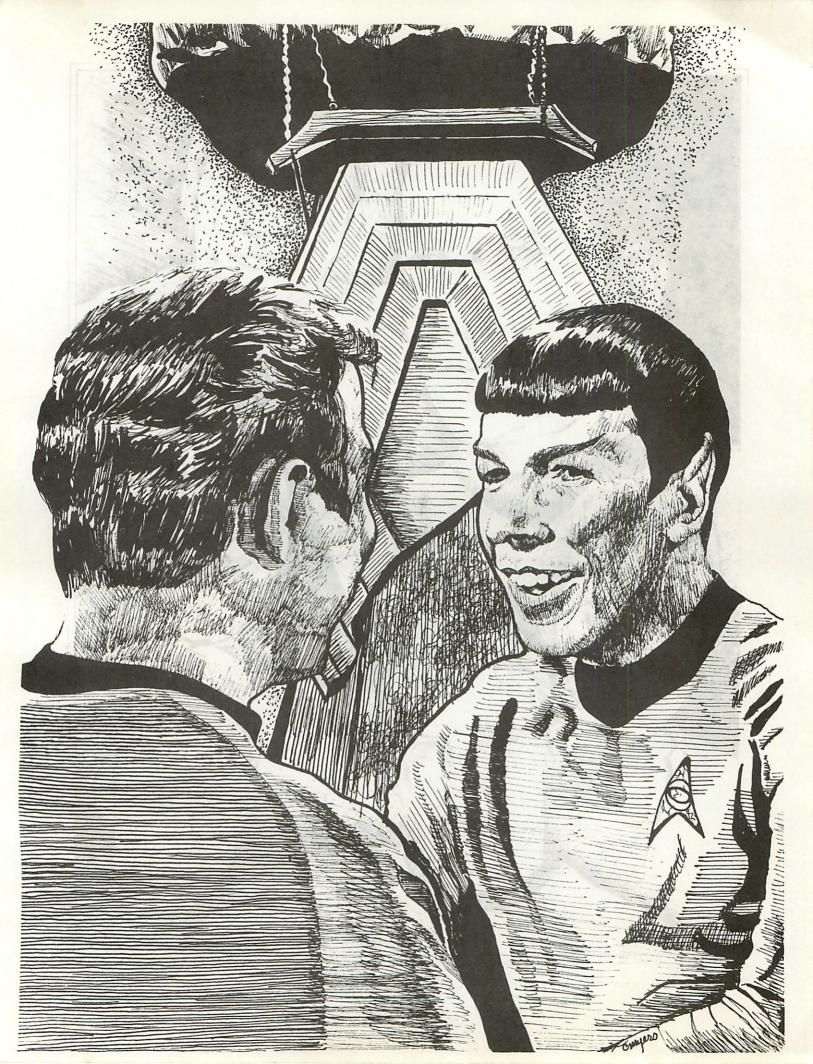
I am not she; But I am here, and now, and she is gone. Come close and warm me with that certain smile, And I will fill your emptiness a while. It's not enough. But it will do, 'til dawn.

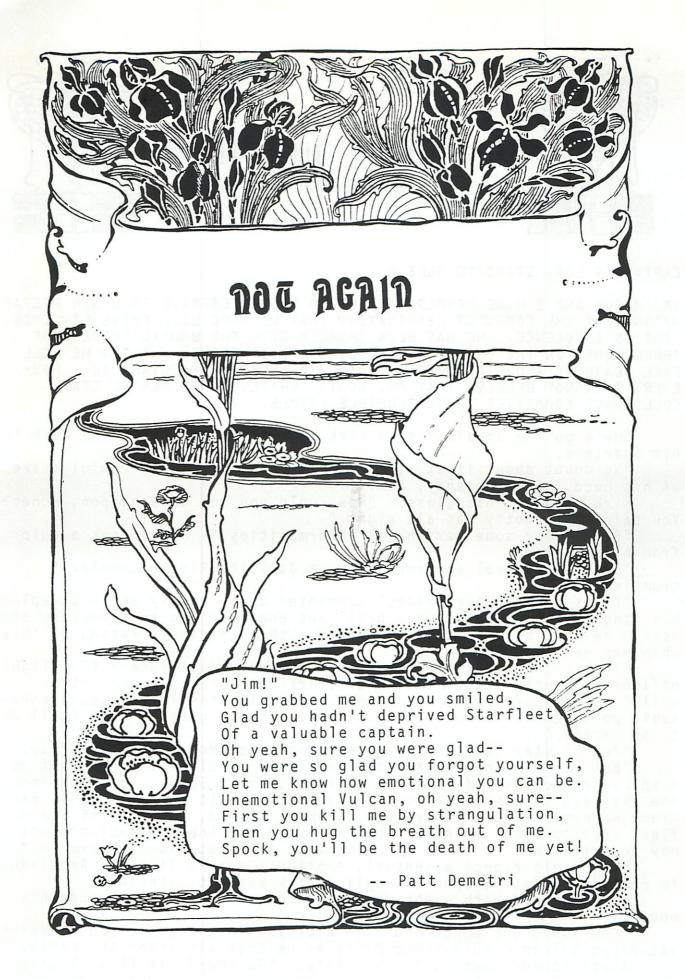
-- Emily Ross

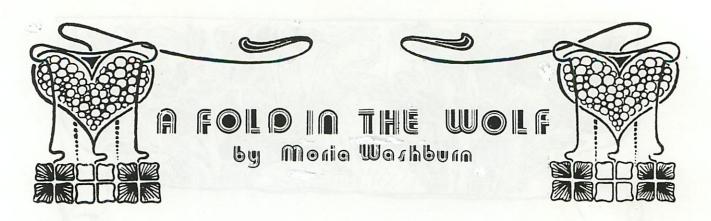




That Certain Smile







CAPTAIN'S LOG STARDATE 3618-6

DR. MCCOY AND I HAVE BEAMED BACK UP TO THE ENTERPRISE TO BEGIN PREPARATIONS FOR THE COMPUTER EXAMINATION THAT WE HOPE WILL PROVE LT. CMDR. SCOTT'S INNOCENCE. HE HAS BEEN CHARGED WITH THE BRUTAL MURDERS OF THREE WOMEN ON THE PLANET OF ARGELIUS AND IF PROVEN GUILTY, HE WILL FACE DEATH BY SLOW TORTURE ACCORDING TO ANCIENT ARGELIAN LAW. HOWEVER, I CANNOT BELIEVE THAT MR. SCOTT, WHATEVER HIS MENTAL STATE, COULD HAVE COMMITTED THESE TERRIBLE CRIMES.

"He's guilty as sin," said Kirk, sitting morosely at the desk in his quarters.

"No doubt about it at all," agreed McCoy with a sorrowful shake of his head. "More brandy, Jim?"

Kirk held out his glass. "How could you let this happen, Bones?

You said that Scotty was all right."
"Except for some peripheral abnormalities." McCoy took a gulp

from his snifter.
"Some peripheral abnormalities--a Jack the Ripper complex,"

grumbled Kirk.

"It is quite unfortunate," commented Spock coolly as he steepled his fingers. "Mr. Scott is a brilliant engineer and an exemplary officer. He will be difficult to replace; the efficiency rating of this

ship may well suffer.

"That's the least of it, Spock. Not only do I lose a top-flight officer if Scotty's convicted, but Starfleet loses a spaceport as well." Kirk glared into his brandy. "And if Starfleet loses a strategic port because of one of my officers, three guesses what it'll do to my career."

"You'll stay 'captain' forever," observed McCoy unnecessarily.
"But it is illogical for the Argelians to close their planet as
a spaceport because of this one incident," said Spock, interrupting
the evil eye that Kirk was casting at McCoy. "It will result in extreme economic hardship for this planet. Indeed, the loss of Starfleet credits spent in Argelian broth-- ah, business establishments
may be sufficient to throw Argelius into a planet-wide depression."

"You can't expect a sensual, emotional people like the Argelians

to react rationally, Spock," replied Kirk without thinking.

Spock raised both eyebrows, drew a deep breath, and opened his mouth.

"One word, ONE WORD, and I'll kick you in the shin, you stinking ass-eared Vulcan," threatened McCoy as he took aim under the table.

Spock looked down at McCoy archly. "Go ahead, if it will give your meager intellect some feeble satisfaction. Besides, since you



KNOW what I was going to say, I don't really need to say it, do I?" McCoy snarled and kicked the Vulcan as hard as he could. His blue eyes widened phenomenally as he howled and disappeared under the

"I'm wearing spiked shin-guards," explained Spock smugly in re-

sponse to Kirk's raised eyebrows.

Kirk listened to the creative cursing and sniffling for a moment, then peered under the desk. "Dammit, Bones, this is serious. If you don't come up now, I'm going to send Spock under after you--and if you do THAT, I'll let him have you this time."

Spock's dark eyes opened wide in alarm and his hands vanished under the edge of the desk. "Doctor McCoy-y-y-y!" he thundered threat-

eningly.

McCoy crawled back up into his chair. "What's the use? You've

probably got spiked guards THERE, too."

"GENTLEMEN," snapped Kirk in exasperation. "Can we please get back to the matter at hand--proving Mr. Scott's innocence--and there-

by, may I add, saving all our respective posteriors as well?"

"I do not believe that MY gluteus maximus is in any danger," observed Spock as he re-steepled his fingers while keeping a wary eye on the doctor. "I am neither Mr. Scott's commanding officer in this situation nor am I the individual who botched his neuroscans--"

"Listen, Spock," said Kirk as he waved an admonishing finger at a livid McCoy, "What happens to mine, happens to yours, too. Is that

clear?"

"You are always perfectly transparent, Captain." Spock lifted

his chin slightly and looked down his nose.

"All right then," said Kirk, eyeing the Vulcan suspiciously. "It's settled. All we've got to do is prove Scotty's innocence to Jaris."

Spock raised a doubtful eyebrow. "And just how do you propose to prove the innocence of an individual who is unquestionably quilty?"

"That's no problem, Spock; no problem at all. We'll just twist the facts to fit our defense. Human lawyers have been doing it for

centuries." Kirk flashed his most pompously charming smile.

"Indeed?" Spock's ears twitched superciliously. "I cannot say much for the handling of the 'facts' by that Human lawyer in your court martial case. If Records Officer Finney had not realized what you were planning to do and scrambled out of the pod at the last minute, and if I had not subsequently found him cowering in a supply room and used the mind-meld to warp his mind and memories to substantiate that rather far-fetched computer malfunction/tampering defense of yours -- "

"Geeze, Spock, are you STILL harping on that?" McCoy smickered nastily. "I though you and Jim had called it all even after he saved your, ahem, !life' when you flipped over that hot little Vulcan number."

Spock raised both eyebrows, then rose to his full moderate height and glared down at the two short Humans. "I may be a Federation second-class-citizen, but I am still not required to sit here and be maligned by a low-browed Georgia misologist--"

"Sit down and save the theatrics for later, Spock." Kirk nimbly kicked the Vulcan's feet out from under him. "We've got to get THIS

mess ironed out--quick!"

Spock rearranged himself in his chair and gingerly felt his lower "Very well. Captain. May I ask what defense you plan to use for Mr. Scott?"

Kirk reached over and solicitously began to rub the bruised area. "Well, ah, everyone knows that Vulcans are better at distorting facts than Humans. I thought YOU might have some ideas."

"Ghosts," purred Spock, his eyes half closed and his ears begin-

ning to droop.

"WHAT did you say?!" Kirk paused in mid-rub.
"Ghosts. Please contin--" The Vulcan's eyes popped open and he turned accusingly toward Kirk. "You pinched me!"

"You deserve more than PINCHING for a suggestion as stupid as that one!" Kirk folded his arms authoritatively over his perceptible bulge. "I don't keep you on board just because you're cute, you know. I want to hear some SENSIBLE ideas on this. The Argelians are a gentle, trusting people with almost no recent experience in dealing with serious criminal acts. It should certainly be easy enough for US to pull the wool over their eyes." He glared at both of his officers.

There was a sixty second pause as McCoy examined his fingernails

and Spock found fascination in the cabin's architecture.

snapped Kirk finally. "Well?!"

"Dammit, Jim" blurted McCoy when it was obvious that Spock was absorbed in the symmetry of the far wall. "Scotty was completely alone with two of those women. How can we blame it off on someone else if there's no one else to blame?" He miserably shook the last drops from the brandy decanter into his glass.

Kirk slammed his fist down on the desk, producing a symphony of cracking metacarpals. "Anybody could have been out in that fog when what's-her-name was killed, and as for Lt. Tracy, well, uh..."

"There is no rational fabrication possible in that case, Captain. Nor can we rationally account for Mr. Scott's 'amnesia'." Spock delicately pressed the tips of his fingers together as he considered how to resubmit his suggestion without getting pinched again.

"Looks like we're sunk to me." McCoy was idly spinning the empty

bottle in the middle of the desk.

"Not necessarily." Spock reached over and gracefully knocked the

bottle out from under McCoy's hand and onto the floor where it shattered with a most satisfying sound effect. "It simply means that we must find an irrational explanation and make it SEEM rational. I have reviewed the tape of the, ah, session during which Jaris' wife was murdered. Sybo made a number of highly provocative statements which we may be able to turn to our advantage."

"Surely you're kidding," McCoy glowered at the Vulcan petulantly.

"Surely you're kidding," McCoy glowered at the Vulcan petulantly. "How are we supposed to use that ... that mumbo-jumbo about a hatred

that never dies? Who's gonna believe that crap?"

"PREFECT JARIS would believe 'that crap'," replied Spock, attempting to maintain his equanimity with the obtuse Humans. "He obviously place great faith in his wife's 'empathic gift', and I was careful, if the captain will recall, to give the impression that there was indeed reason to trust her abilities—at least to some degree. That conversation will, of course, be recorded in our official Communications transcripts and will provide acceptable documentation for a later decision on our part to pursue any 'data' revealed by Sybo during her trance. Prefect Jaris is grief-stricken and will be anxious to believe anything that give meaning to his wife's death beyond that of a senseless murder by a deranged man; therefore, any defense that we can concoct that substantiates Sybo's psychometric maunderings, and thereby comforts Jaris, has an 87.631% chance of success."

Kirk had been single-mindedly examining his aching hand for possible damage. He now flexed it carefully and peered at Spock through

his spread fingers. "Just what, exactly, are you suggesting?"

Spock reached over, took Kirk's hand and began to gently massage it. "One of the words that Sybo spoke coincidentally resembles an actual Terran name applied to an infamous 19th century murderer of

women; redjec--Red Jack, better known as Jack the Ripper."

McCoy abruptly staggered to his feet and began to make his uneven way toward Kirk's liquor cabinet. "Are you outta your mind, you miscegenational Vulcan?!" he slurred over his shoulder. "Are you suggesting that we claim Jack the Ripper killed THESE women?! That's the silliest thing I ever--" There was a dull thump as McCoy ran into the cabinet.

"I am not suggesting Jack the Ripper per se, but rather, shall we



say, the SPIRIT of Jack the Ripper." Spock appeared to be reading Kirk's palm.

"Migod, Jim! He's finally flipped his wig! He really IS suggesting ghosts!" McCoy rattled futilely for a moment at the locked

cabinet door, then gave up and sat on the floor.

"No, Bones. I think Spock may have something here," replied Kirk, double-checking to make sure that McCoy's position on the floor prevented him from seeing anything but Spock's back. "Remember what Sybo said about 'a hunger that never dies' and a 'hatred of life, of woman'? We could claim that it was some sort of ... of malevolent entity that killed those three women, and not REALLY Mr. Scott." Kirk smiled his thanks as he recovered his hand from Spock's grasp.

Spock politely folded his hands in his lap. "Another attractive aspect is that such an entity would not necessarily be constrained by our physical limitations. A locked door, for instance, would not deter it from reaching its prey. Also, Mr. Scott's lapses of memory could be attributed to a hypnotic screen thrown up by the enity."

McCoy sputtered from his rat's-eye view of the floor. "Thrown up?! That's what I'm about to do--only in the present tense and it's not gonna be any 'hypnotic screen'! This is the most idiotic thing I've ever heard of! What kind of a ... a creature could gallop around

the galaxy stabbing women?!"

"We have been carrying one such creature on board with us for some time now. Remember our shore leave on Rigel IV a year ago and the quaint souvenir dagger that Mr. Scott returned with on that occasion?" Spock surpressed an urge to twiddle his thumbs. "However, the type of creature that I am suggesting would be noncorporeal in nature and would feed on the emotion of fear generated by its victims. Similar entities have been documented. The Drella of Alpha Carinae V feeds on the emotion of love. Its 'victims' tend to suffer from attacks of maudlinness in mild cases, whereas severe attacks can result in full-scale family reunions. The existence of a creature that feeds on hate or fear is not only plausible, but possibly preferable as well."

"VERY funny," snorted McCoy, diplomatically ignoring the misplaced underwear he'd discovered under the cabinet. "But who's REALLY gonna believe a story like THAT?"

Kirk sighed and exchanged glances with Spock. "As Spock pointed out, Bones, Jaris is already preconditioned to believe, and what Jaris believes, every other Argelian will believe, too. As for Starfleet, well, if Command bought that one about my transporter-split nasty half trying to rape Janice Rand, they'll believe ANYTHING."

"True, Starfleet does seem extraordinarily anxious to accept almost anything we claim." Spock thoughtfully rubbed the end of his nose

against his once-again artfully arranged fingers.

Kirk grinned wickedly. "With this ship's record of pulling the Federation's nuts out of the fire time and time again, who can blame them for wanting to believe whatever we tell them? After all, we get results, so who cares how? In this case, the only source of trouble that I can see is that Rigellian--Hengist."

McCoy had crawled back to his chair and pulled himself up into it. He made a conscientious effort to act sober. "Which means if we're really gonna try to pull this idio--this plan off, we're gonna have to discredit him somehow, because we're never gonna be able to dupe him." He paused and eyed his empty snifter sorrowfully for a moment, then he brightened. "You know that officious little bastard would make a perfect patsy."

"'Patsy'?" Spock cocked a curious eyebrow in Kirk's direction.

"A scapegoat," supplied Kirk. "And McCoy's right--that's the

perfect way to get rid of that twerp."

"Indeed," Spock nodded thoughtfully. "We could designate him as the permanent host for our malevolent entity, and therefore as the individual ultimately responsible for the murders." Spock gazed levelly at Kirk. "It would, however, necessitate the complete and permanent removal of any evidence to the contrary."

Kirk shrugged. "So what? He doesn't have any immediate family,

and no one else is going to miss that compulsive little prig.

"Then I do not forsee any serious obstacles to this plan," said Spock, discretely manipulating the Humans through the last few important details. "I can easily adjust the computers to produce any 'special effects' required to support our contentions. I will also provide sufficient background 'facts' to embellish our 'Jack the Ripper' scenario, such as a list of other planets having suffered brutal multiple slayings of women--with Rigel IV being the most recent, of course. And I will arrange for the colloquial designations of these various mass murderers to coincide with the 'names' to which Sybo referred--Beratis and Kesla. As usual, no one will bother to check the lesser details for absolute accuracy."

Kirk chuckled. "Your computer expertise is endlessly valuable, He turned toward McCoy. "Now, about the people actually Mr. Spock."

involved."

McCoy was finally getting into the spirit of the thing. "No problem, Jim. Hengist is already slightly paranoid, and I can slip him a drug that'll send him screaming right over the edge. If I can get him alone long enough for a quick little posthypnotic suggestion --or if I can get Spock to use one of his top secret, long distance telepathic zaps--I can have that little jerk foaming at the mouth and shrieking like a banshee." McCoy rubbed his hands together in anticipation.

Spock quirked a mildly amused eyebrow at McCoy's growing enthu-

"I would, of course, prefer that Dr. McCoy use hypnosis on Hengist, but I will use the L'zptRe technique if it becomes absolutely necessary. Also, I believe we should affect Jaris as well, although to a much lesser degree, in order to fully involve him in the incident and prevent him from possibly picking up any false notes."

Kirk rubbed his chin and was disappointed to find it still "It wouldn't, in fact, be a bad idea to drug everyone on the ship. It would keep them pliable and gullible to whatever we need to do." He glanced over at McCoy.

"GREAT idea, Jim. I've got some stuff that would tranquilize a volcano. Everybody will be grinning agreeably for hours no

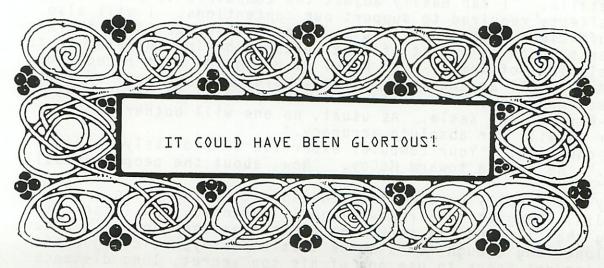


matter WHAT we do." McCoy's eyes glittered as he considered the

possibilities.

"Well, then, that's it, gentlemen. Let's get our props ready for the side show and reel in the chumps." Kirk stood up and smiled charmingly at his two best conspirators. "And so we chalk up another triumph for Truth, Justice, and The Federation Way, in the name of Starfleet and the USS Enterprise."

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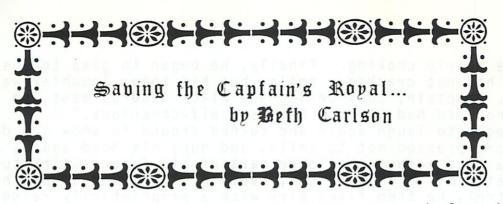


When we first heard of you Earthers,
It was as a race of pale,
soft beings, incapable
of anger, or even
self defense.
And then I met you, Kirk,
on that planet of peace-mouthing chelots
and knew you to be brother-a Warrior,
and proud of it.



We stood,
side by side,
fighting for the right
to fight.
Kindred, joined in anger.
closer than birth-locked twins.
If I cannot call you "friend,"
I am proud to call you
"enemy." (A distinction I reserve
only for those few
worthy of that honored name.
Someday, Kirk, the Organians
will lose interest in their
academic experiment, and then,
ahhh, Kirk, then-it will be glorious!

-- Catherine L. Whitehead



Jim Kirk strode onto the bridge a minute or so before the beginning of the watch. Wandering around, he listened to the various night crew bringing their reliefs up to date. Spock always collected the information from the computer and told it all to him at the beginning of each watch, but he liked to hear it himself. Besides, it gave him a chance to make contact with people who were usually awake while he

was asleep .

Satisfied that all was as it should be, he went to his seat and slid back into it. To his shock there was a sudden, barely audible "rriipp," accompanied by the sickening feeling of material pulling apart. His eyes widened as he looked at the star field in front of him. Shifting his eyes without moving his head, he looked at Sulu and Chekov--there was no sign that they had heard. Slowly, he turned his head to the left. Scotty was still talking to an ensign at the engineering console. He shifted his eyes a little further back. Uhura was engrossed in her panel. A large sigh softly found its way out of him; no one had heard. The relief was short lived as he realized that eventually he was going to have to stand up. He couldn't stay in this seat for the rest of his life--though it sounded infinitely preferable to everyone seeing his.... With another wave of embarrassment it dawned on him that he had forgotten to pick up his laundry and that he wasn't even wearing regulation black briefs. "Why today?" he moaned inwardly, remembering the lavender satin shorts he had put on just minutes ago when he'd found his underwear drawer empty. They had been a joke gift from a young woman on one of his shore leaves and he had held onto them as a souvenir; he'd never intended to wear them. What had he said when he'd put them on? "No one's going to see them...." God, what a mess! He could feel his face getting redder as he wondered if there was any chance that he could get to the turbolift without anyone noticing. No, he decided, he would get up and march out. And if anyone dared to say a word, he'd...oh, God.

"Captain?" "Uh, Spock, uh--"

"Sir," the Vulcan's eyes gave him away. "Before I give you the report on the last watch, might I have a word with you in private?" Kirk's eyes grew wide with panic and the Vulcan, perceptably

straining to keep a straight face, continued. "If you will lead the

way to the briefing room, I will follow."

At that, Kirk lowered his head to hide a grin, then looked up when he had gained control. "Yes, Mr. Spock, I'd be glad to join you in the briefing room." He rose from the seat and headed toward the lift with Spock in close but reasonable pursuit. As the doors shut behind them Kirk erupted with an explosion of whooping laughter. He laughed until his sides ached and tears were running down his cheeks. When Spock lowered his head and stopped the turbolift, Kirk only laughed harder,

until he was nearly choking. Finally, he began to gasp to a stop. Spock still had not cracked a smile, but his inner laughter was all too obvious. "Captain, considering the black undergarment, no one would have noticed had you not been so self-conscious."

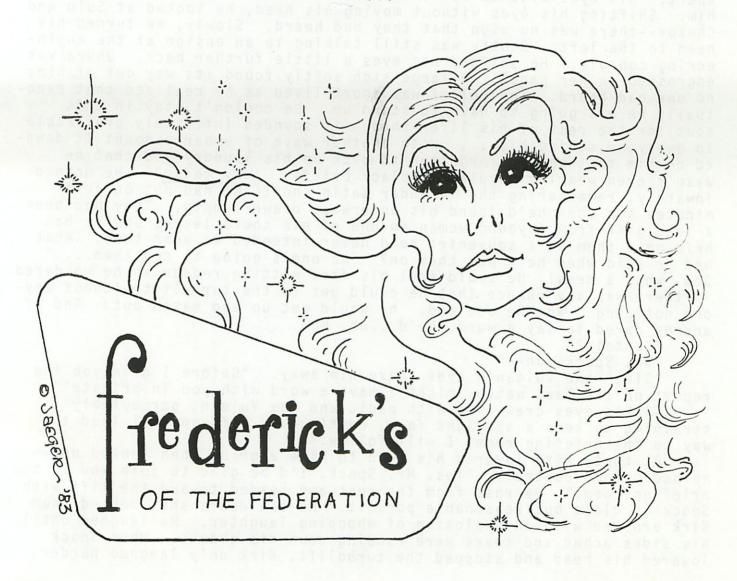
Kirk began to laugh again and turned around to show the damage. Spock was hard pressed not to smile, and hung his head again, actually putting a hand across the lower part of his face as Kirk turned and looked at him. "You're right, Captain. They would have noticed." Gaining control, he then fixed Kirk with a proprietarily raised eyebrow.

"C'mon, Spock, don't look at me like that. I was out of under-

wear! I don't wear stuff like this as a rule--I don't!"

Spock just looked at him. "If you say so, Captain."
"SPOCK!!" he wailed, exasperated. Then he realized that the Vulcan was laughing at him--somewhere inside of that calm exterior--and he began to giggle again. "How do I get myself into these messes?

Let's go." He reached past the Vulcan and reactivated the lift.
"I don't know, Captain. I truly do not know."





Captain James T. Kirk shifted the most famous buns in Starfleet in his plush command chair and gazed intently at the star-field expanding on the main scanner ahead of him. One of those bright specks near the center of the screen would be Starbase Eleven, towards which they were heading with all the warp speed he could justify for a starship returning from a tour of duty to a well-earned spell of R&R. Having just rescued a scientific colony which had injudiciously settled on a planet that periodically blew off its entire top crust into space in a gigantic spring-cleaning operation, Kirk felt that the Rest and Recreation period that was approaching for all of them was surely top priority. He was apprehensive, for he knew that they were more likely to receive a dangerous assignment now than at any other time during normal routine operations, because Starfleet was, after all, a bureaucracy, and as such its usual practice was to foul up. He was right. The look on Uhura's face as she apologetically cleared her throat said it all.

"Uh, Captain, this just came in from Starfleet," she said, handing him a

piece of paper, knowing better than to read it in front of the crew.

Kirk swore under his breath as he scanned the document.

"Diverted--just because some desk-bound dunsel thinks that a bunch of lazy miners need a *starship* to get them off their asses!" he cursed, not too loudly. "Mr. Sulu--set course for the mining colony on Urania III."

But Sulu had already unlocked the helm controls when he saw Uhura rise...

"...And that, gentlemen, is the sole reason for our diversion, if you can believe it." Kirk glared round the table, as though daring anyone to believe it.

"After fifteen years in Starfleet, I'd believe it if those bureaucratic idiots told us to go back to scalpels and sewing-needles," said McCoy, his drawl a little flat from fatigue. Spock, of course, was showing no signs of tiring whatsoever. An astute observer might have realized that this could have had something to do with McCoy's presence.

"The truth or falsity of the miner's claim that the rock bearing the dikrohnium ore is too depleted for them to achieve their quota can easily be determined," Spock mused. "Yet the preliminary surveys carried out in that area showed that the extraction could be continued at maximum rate for several decades. I do not understand why they should choose an obviously flimsy excuse if they have fallen behind schedule for reasons they would rather not admit."

"If they're in the same condition we are, they may not feel up to the task of concocting a perfect excuse," interjected McCoy. Spock raised an eyebrow quizzically.

"Gentlemen...I suggest that the best way to find out is to go down there," said Kirk hurriedly.

[&]quot;I don't believe it!"

[&]quot;You, uh, thought we might not be telling you the truth?"

"Your story was somewhat--unusual," said Kirk diplomatically.

Spock looked up from the three-dimensional scanner that occupied a corner of

the mine control room opposite Kirk and the head miner, Martens.

"The main node is approximately forty-two percent depleted past the scheduled abundance," he observed. The display resembled a Gruyere cheese; holes and tunnels punctuated the entire hologram.

"Which boils down to 'zactly what we told ya in the first place, Cap'n," said Martens dryly. Kirk started momentarily, then a smile of reassurance came to his

face.

"Well, Mister Martens, I don't think you need worry about your misplaced ore, now that you have the resources of a *starship* to search for it," he replied, then walked calmly out of the control room, followed by a puzzled Spock.

"Captain, either you are aware of some special resource aboard the *Enterprise* which I am not, or you have some insight into the location of the missing ore

which eludes me," he stated.

"Actually, Spock, I haven't a clue where the stuff is, nor how to find it. I was merely," he added quickly, "being ah, diplomatic." He cocked his head to one side as though weighing the truth of this assertion, and then strode on, leaving Spock as puzzled as before.

"HOME SWEET HOME" pronounced the plaque in large Gothic letters.

"Like it?" inquired the merchant. His dingy shop caused Sulu to marvel that even in the middle of a complex constucted with the latest technology there was still a place for nineteenth-century squalor. He tried to look uninterested in the heavy metal decoration being offered.

"I might--if the price is right."

The merchant beamed. He knew he had a buyer.

M

Sulu signalled his presence outside the Captain's temporary quarters in the colony. Kirk opened the door asking, almost curtly, "Got anything?"

"I think so, sir, if you'll permit me to show you."

"Go ahead."

Sulu put his head out of the door and whistled. Chekov appeared, toting an anti-grav hauler loaded with huge slabs of engraved metal. From the color of his face, it appeared that the anti-grav unit wasn't doing all the effort. The young Russian dumped the tablets on the floor--narrowly avoiding Kirk's toes--and snapped to attention. Kirk looked at the plates, which bore inscriptions such as "Best Navigator In The Galaxy", "You'll Never Warp Alone", "A Clean Starship Is A Happy Starship". Kirk looked askance at Sulu.

"While conducting my investigations, sir, I discovered a thriving black market in engraved metal plaques. I, er, acquired these as examples," the

Oriental recited. Kirk was pensive.

"Well, it's not much to go on, since there surely can't be enough plaques to account for the missing ore, but we'll have to look into it. Have these--'samples'--transported up to the ship for analysis and then work on finding their source. I hope you didn't spend too much on them."

Chekov shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, that's all right, sir, it came out of, er, petty cash," he finished awkwardly as Sulu turned and glared at him.

"Even though the estimates of the total amount of metal involved in this illicit industry do not begin to approach the mass of the missing ore, I confess that I too can see no better course of investigation at present, Captain," said Spock, as the party drew up before the door of an apartment in the lower levels of the city.

Sulu's questioning of black market traders (which consumed more petty cash for alcohol than he had spent on the plaques) had led them to this apartment.

"Ready, gentlemen?" asked Kirk. He signalled at the door; a scanner came on, and seemed to hiccough upon seeing him. From within they heard the sound of rapidly receding footsteps. Kirk quickly phasered the lock on the door, and rushed inside, where he suddenly skidded to a halt, causing the other members of the party to pile up behind him. A rotund figure hastily stepped away from an exit and, deciding to make the best of the situation, beamed generously at his unexpected company.

"Mudd!" every member of the *Enterprise* party exlaimed simultaneously.

The rotund figure seemed to gauge his chances of denying this accusation, apparently thought better of it, and stepped forward to grasp Kirk's hand

disarmingly.

"Jim Kirk, me old boy, what a pleasure it is to see you! Lucky you came when you did, too, as I was just about to go out on, er, business." The handle-bar moustache waggled in an obvious display of pleasure.

"Business, Harry?" murmured Kirk, still dazed.

"Why yes! I'm in the...the home decorating business now! I've done the decent thing and turned over a new leaf. The old Harcourt Fenton Mudd is no more; the figure you see before you is a paragon of virtue." And at this, Mudd glowed with more self-righteousness than a preacher at a revivalist meeting.

"You are behind the illicit trade in metal plaques, Mr. Mudd?" inquired Spock coldly. Mudd's face fell back from the dizzy heights of self-esteem it

had been ascending. He scowled.

"And if it isn't Mr. Pixie himself, Mr. Spock!" He bent closer to Kirk, whispering conspiratorially, "Did you have to bring him along? Such a wet blanket on any conversation. I was thinking, we could go along to the bar and reminisce over the bad old days--"

"You're behind the black market, Mudd?" snapped Kirk, his composure now

recovered. Mudd wavered.

"We-ll, to be *strictly* correct, that is to say, I *really* haven't... I, er, yes. Look," he went on, "it's really not as scandalous as all that--there's no need for you to bother yourselves with such a *minot* matter. But since you've come all this way just to see old Harry, why don't I give you something to be going home with, eh, Jim lad? How about this, er charming room sign?" he said, grabbing a slab at random from a pile behind a couch. Kirk looked at it. It read "LADIES ONLY". He looked impatiently at Mudd.

"How about a headstone?" suggested Mudd. "Something I've always wanted to

do for you, Jim, boy; must be my generous nature..."

"No headstone, Harry," growled Kirk. He was about to discourse at length on Mudd's shortcomings when something about the plaque in his hands caught his eye-something about the odd, flowing style of the lettering.

"Come here, Spock, look at this. Doesn't this look familiar to you?"

"Yess...the smoothness of the letter formation suggests that this was formed..." --he looked up--"by a Horta!"

Kirk confronted Mudd.

"Is this how you get these things so cheap, Mudd? Have you brought Hortas to this planet?" he demanded.

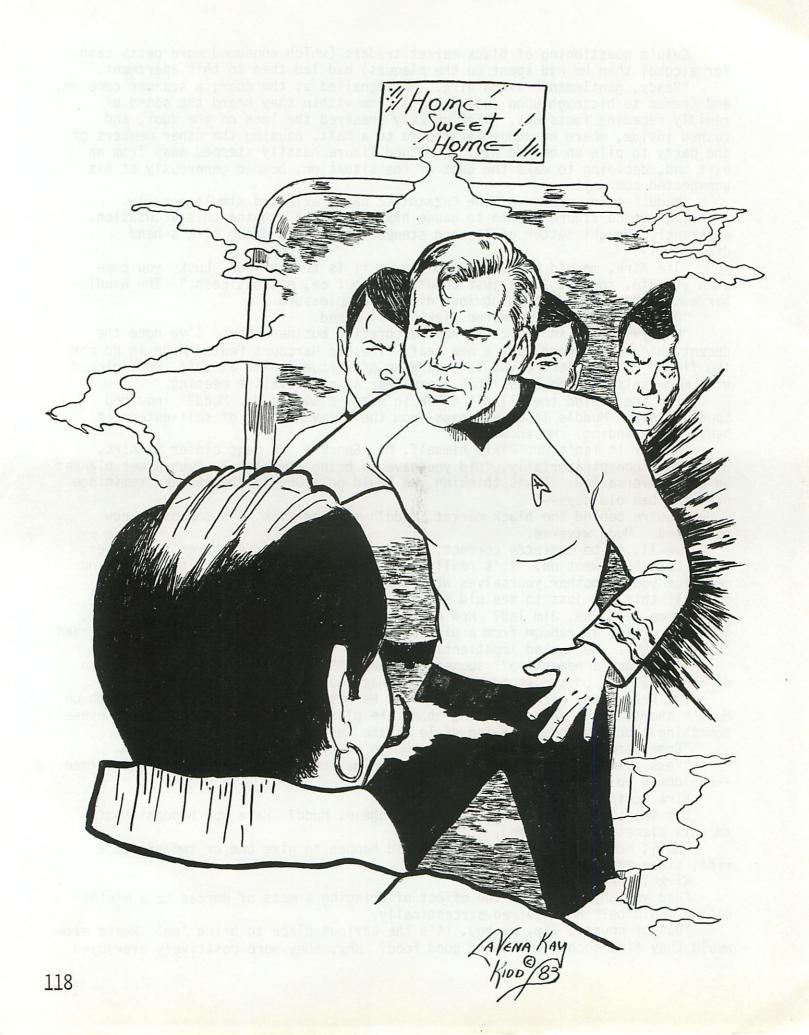
"Well, now that you mention it, I did happen to give one or two of 'em a ride, since they were going this way..."

Kirk looked darkly at Mudd.

"Had you any idea what the effect of bringing a mass of Hortas to a mining

colony would be?" he inquired sarcastically.

"But of course, Jim, me boy, it's the obvious place to bring 'em! Where else would they find such a wealth of good food? Why, they were positively overjoyed



when I told 'em what the pickings were like here." Mudd grinned smugly at this, confident that he had a point. Spock had a point, too.

"Due to the Hortas, the main supply of ore is now over forty-two percent depleted past its scheduled abundance," he stated flatly. Mudd's grin vanished.

"Er, that much, eh?" Kirk's expression set.

"All right, Harry, come with us, there are some gentlemen from the legal

profession interested in talking to you--" he began.

"But, Kirk, old man, what do you have to charge me with? A little business on the side--why, that goes on all the time around here. What could you charge me with? Eh?"

"Exporting livestock without a license." started Kirk. Mudd smiled. "But the Hortas are intelligent critters, Kirk. Not livestock at all!" "Avoiding immigration procedures." Kirk hazarded. Mudd's smile widened.

"Look, Kirk, the plain truth is, I haven't done a thing. Not a thing. The Hortas agreed to come with me, and they're doin' no harm here--I looked it up in the Federation charter meself. Section 12, paragraph 5, sub-section 4 (f): "All sentient creatures shall have the right to eat their native food"--or words to that effect. Now, be reasonable, Jim me boy." He beamed again, and Kirk's anger increased.

"Mudd, this colony is very shortly going to have to close down its operations, because of you, Harry. Do you think you're going to get away with it? Not that the Hortas will starve, of course, since they'll be able to eat the ore that's inaccessible to the miners here. Somehow we've got to find a way of getting them together so we can ship them out of here. And then we're coming for you, Harry"-he emphasized his point by prodding Mudd in the gut--"so you'd better be ready."

"Now Kirk," began Mudd expansively, with the air of a man who knows he has four aces in his hand and one up his sleeve, "I'm sure we can come to an understanding here. You see, there's really only one way you can get the Hortas to come to you. I happen to have invented-during an otherwise boring day--a little gadget which lets me talk to the Hortas. Sends vibrations through the rock, that's what it does."

"Where is it, Harry?" snapped Kirk.

"Now, now, Jim, not so fast," admonished Mudd. Spock raised his voice.

"Captain, that would be the device invented at the base on Janus VI by Professor Jurgens that was reported stolen several months ago." Mudd looked vexed.

"Blast you, Mr. Pixie," he grumbled, momentarily losing his composure. "But anyway, Kirk, you see you'll really have to--"

He was cut off by a sudden rumbling from under the floor that increased in volume until it coalesced at the base of one wall, which glowed red in an area the size of a man-hole cover, then disintegrated. Those in the room gaped at the gray-white mass that inched its way towards them, towards Mudd...finally stopping a few feet before the transfixed self-styled entrepreneur.

"I'm no expert, but I'd say that was a sick Horta," opined Sulu, finally

breaking the silence. Kirk turned to McCoy.

"Can you do anything for it?"

McCoy grumbled, "I thought I told you I'm a doctor, not a brick-layer," but set to work immediately. After a few seconds work with a scanner, he shook his head and looked up.

"It's dead, Jim." "What killed it?"

"Near as I can tell, radiation poisoning."

Scotty broke in.

"Cap'n, the ore from this planet is highly radio-active--that's partly why it's so valuable, because it's easy to form isotopes from it." The Scott shook his head. "I should ha' realized what that would do to the wee beasties."

"You hardly had time, Scotty," said Kirk. His voice hardened. "But Harry Mudd here had plenty of opportunity, didn't you?" he asked acidly. Mudd spluttered.

"Now that's not fair--what d'you think I am, a doctor? How was I to know

that they would be affected by the radiation?"

Kirk opened his mouth to reply, but was interrupted by a low humming noise. He quickly identified the source of the sound as a non-descript sculpture standing on a narrow pedestal in another corner of the room. Mudd twitched.

"What's that noise?" demanded Kirk. Mudd's eyes opened wide, affecting

innocence.

"Noise? Er, what noise? I don't hear any noise. Must be your imagination,

Kirk. Now look--"

Spock had crossed to the sculpture and was examining it. He pronounced it to be the transmitter about which Mudd had been so reticent. Mudd gave Spock one of his "If looks could kill, you'd be pickled in brine by now" expressions. The noise from the communicator changed to a series of low, groaning noises. Then a slow, hollow voice spoke from it:

"Har-court Mudd, you have de-ceived us," it accused sepulchrally. "The rock here is pois-oned and many of us are dy-ing. We know one of our num-ber to be dead already. We dec-lare our right of t'lata on you, and all that stand with you."

Mudd's expression was that of a dog caught urinating on the rug.

"Wh-what does it mean, Kirk?"

Spock responded evenly: "T'lata is the Horta name for ritual torture performed upon those who have committed grave crimes against the Hortan race. The Hortas employ their ability to melt solid rock to inflict a series of burns upon their victims--"

Mudd had heard enough. So had the rest of the *Enterprise's* party. Kirk crossed to the sculpture to have Spock point out the transmitting controls, then

spoke to the Hortas.

"This is Captain James T. Kirk of the USS' Enterprise. I am here with Harry Mudd. I and my crew once saved your race when you were being unwittingly exterminated on your home planet. My first officer, Mr. Spock here, communicated with the guardian of your eggs." He motioned to Spock to take the microphone. Spock spoke just one word, looking for a moment almost uncomfortable.

"Remember?"

The response from the Hortas was immediate.

"Spock...you who saved our race--you are not subject to T'lata."

"And my companions?"

"Those men of the *Enter-prise* are freed with you, since they too helped us." "And...Mr. Mudd?"

"No. He must stay. We are com-ing for him now. Please do not ob-struct us." Spock looked at Kirk and shrugged. Kirk thought for a moment, while Mudd looked an aghast.

"Well Harry, we did what we could. Sorry about this," Kirk eventually declared, rather off-handedly. Spock raised an eyebrow but said nothing. Scotty

spoke up.

"But Cap'n, we can't just leave him here to die by torture! Why, it's--"

Mudd found his voice.

"Yess, Kirk--listen to him! What about the transporter? You could get us all out of here in a jiffy with that little dingus, couldn't you?" He looked at Kirk eagerly. Kirk shook his head.

"I'm afraid it can't operate through fifteen miles of solid rock, Harry. There's nothing we can do." He picked up the communicator and started to leave

the room. Mudd couldn't believe it.

"Kirk, you can't mean this! Jim lad, you can't do this to me! Why--why they're going to kill me! Look, now I know we've had our differences in the past,

but surely we can settle those? I mean--for heaven's sake, Kirk--"
Kirk was solemn.

"Sorry, Harry." He walked out, followed by the other members of his party. Outside was a double line of Hortas, flanking the exit. On either side of the men were dozens of throbbing bodies, all looking rather sick. Mudd tried to rush from the room but, a Horta swiftly blocked his path and he shrank back into the room. The Horta withdrew. It was obvious that waiting was going to be a major part of the torture. Sulu looked uncomfortably at Kirk.

"Sir...I know Mudd isn't the most pleasant person we've met...but surely he

deserves better treatment than that! Can't we do anything?"

Kirk grinned.

"I had to buy some time, and I thought that it wouldn't do Harry any harm to meditate over his sins while we were getting him out. Of course I'm going to do what I can." McCoy motioned to Spock, and they both knelt down by one of the more poorly-looking Hortas.

Kirk manipulated the transmitter.

"Hello. I have something I think you should know. Are you prepared to listen?" The Hortas listened while Kirk argued very convincingly that if they really wanted Mudd to suffer, a far crueller punishment than death would be to let him be tried in a Federation court. Kirk was persuasive, but the Hortas were wordly-wise as well as intelligent, and they remained sceptical. It was getting to the point where Kirk was beginning to feel that he would have to ask Spock to repeat the same lie to them if he was ever going to convince them, when his time-wasting manoever paid off in an unexpected fashion. McCoy was bending over a flushed Horta, with a slowly-spreading grin of triumph on his face. Kirk looked at him with growing hope. A cure for radiation poisoning? It couldn't be!

"Wouldn't you know it!" announced McCoy. "You can stop up the radiation in these things the same way they used to in the old nuclear fission reactors! Boron and graphite, in massive quantitites, absorb the free neutrons in their digestive

systems before they have a chance to damage important organs:"

Kirk gave orders swiftly. The entire *Enterprise*'s supply of boron and graphite was to be beamed down to the nearest pick-up point, and he dispatched the two security men to collect it. He then gave the news to the Hortas via the communicator, and the effect was immediate. The Hortas withdrew from the door to Mudd's apartment and formed a neat line behind McCoy, who looked a little embarrassed at this Pied Piper treatment. They had forgotten about Mudd, it seemed. Kirk left McCoy administering the medicine to the Hortas while he and Spock went back into Mudd's room. A peculiar sight greeted them. Mudd was curled up on the middle of of the floor, eyes tightly closed, giving every appearance of being in agony. Kirk bent over and touched him, lightly. Mudd screamed.

"Oh, God, here they come again! I'm done for this time! Oh, the pain, the pain! I'm too young to die! Please, God--" At this point he opened his eyes to

see Kirk bending over him, and he moaned again.

"It's over--I'm dead! I've died and gone to Hell--it must be Hell, James Kirk is here with me!"

When Mudd calmed down, Kirk explained matters to him.

"...and so you see, Harry, we've managed to get you off the hook. At least, for the moment," he added. Mudd looked warily at Kirk.

"What do'you mean--for the moment?"

"Well, we're just using the last of the *Enterprise*'s stock of boron and graphite to prevent the Hortas from dying. But they'll need considerably more than that to make them well enough to travel home, and they're really too weak to go and get it for themselves. You see, there's plenty of boron and graphite in the crust of this planet, but the miners are so busy trying to make up their quotas that they haven't the time to go and get it for us. However, they do have some



spare extraction tools--they don't use them themselves because they're--how shall I put it--a little more *primitive* than the equipment they normally use."

Mudd's face was falling like an express elevator. Kirk was enjoying himself.

"So, while we're taking a little rest in orbit, we've decided that you should be given the important task of recovering enough boron to last us until we get the Hortas home. Ah--here comes Mr. Scott with your tools now."

Scott entered--not, as Mudd had anticipated, laboring under the weight of heavy phaser-blasters, nor even pneumatic extractors. Instead, he was swinging

a pick-axe and a shovel.

"I dinnae think Mister Mudd will be wanting any instructions in using these, do ye, Cap'n?" he inquired innocently. "Oh, by the way, I've heard that the little critters are busily helping themselves to our scrap metal in the cargo hold. Very useful beasties to have on a starship," he grinned.

Kirk smiled at Mudd and handed the shovel to him.

"Well, Harry, time to get working." Mudd looked pained.

"Look, Kirk," he began, "it's not that I'm not grateful, you understand-far from it--but surely...?" He gave up when he saw Kirk's face. He trudged wearily out of the room. Kirk called after him.

"Oh, Harry--" he pointed. "The boron deposits are thataway." Mudd reversed direction and plodded off, muttering to himself.

On board the bridge once more, Kirk smiled at McCoy.

"Well, Bones, it was certainly appreciative of the Hortas to make you an honorary egg-mother, don't you think?"

"I've delivered a few babies in my time, but this is the first time I've

been called a mother. I rather like it."

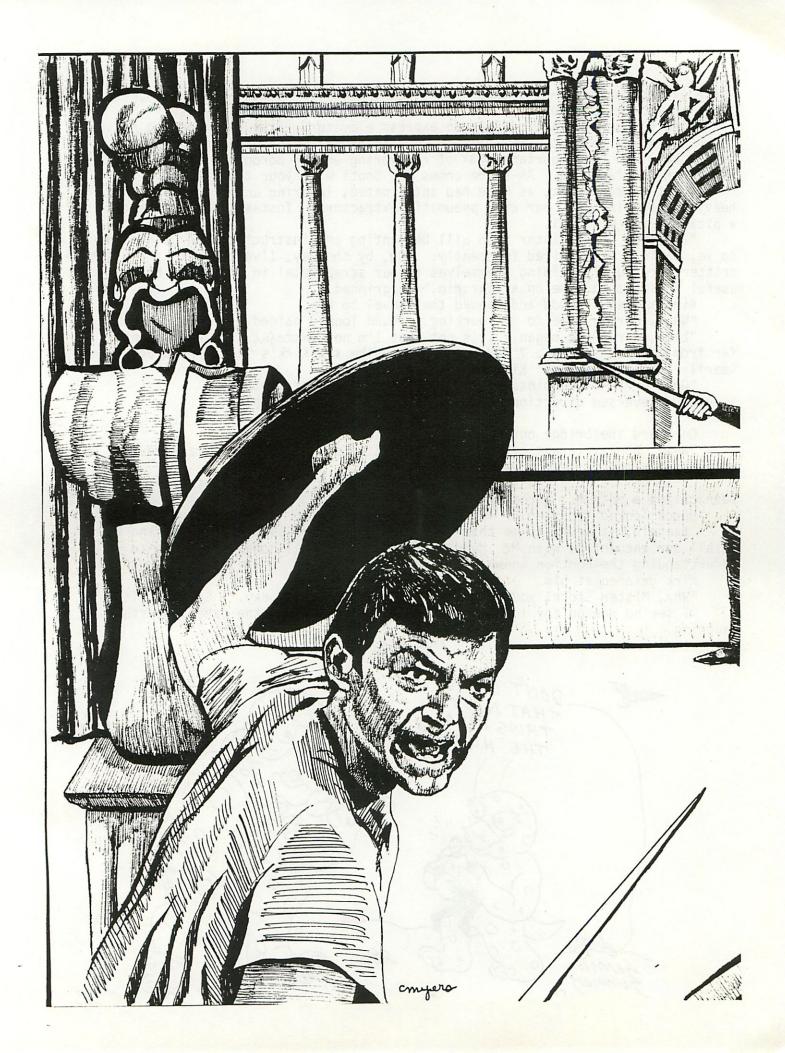
Spock looked troubled.

"Captain, it seems to me that the one constructive element that I find common to all our encounters with Mr. Mudd is that each time, I come very close to understanding the emotion known as *invitation*."

Kirk grinned at him.

"Why, Mister Spock, you're becoming more human every day." Spock stiffened.
"I see no reason for insults, sir--" he began, before the others started laughing.







halp!

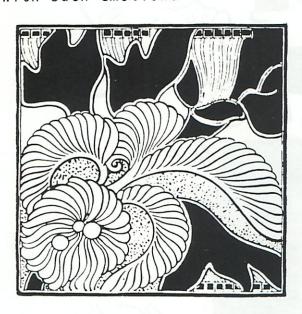
Did I need any help?! Damn pointy-eared elf. I'm a doctor, not a freedom fighter. Of course I needed help! I haven't had to qualify ななななななななななななななななななな For armed combat in years.
I could barely lift that sword, Much less swing it. I'm also a doctor, even though you Act like I'm an incompetent idiot. I can't just hack pieces out of Someone's hide for amusement --Especially when I may be the only One around who can patch them up. I've even patched you up on occasion. Did I need any help. It was almost funny; Next time just watch it. You were almost too late, Unless you wanted to play doctor And glue all my pieces back together. Did I need any help. Damn stupid question anyway.

Condition green! Well, I knew it could someday Come to this, watching the sacrifice Of my friends To uphold the Federation. ななななななななななななななななななななな How can I bear to lose them? But it may save the ship and crew, If Scotty and Uhura are Scanning the television programs They'll be sure to think of something. Good old Captain Kirk, waiting for Someone else to pull his ass Out of the fire again. Have to put up a good front Because if I don't, if I Show any empasssion or fear, They will be doomed. And I will lose the friends that mean More to me than that ship up there. I hope they can understand My show of indifference. God, Spock, what a dumb question! Of course he needs help I need some help, too. C'mon, Scotty, hurry up!

The Best Medicine

(OTHER THAN BEADS & RATTLES)

It has been said I have no emotions. Indeed? How little you know Or understand me. I experience That Which you experience, But have merely achieved A degree of control You humans have yet to seek. It is not always easy. There exists one emotional act Which attacks Quite unexpectedly, Threatening to destroy the Serenity That has so long eluded me. Its incomprehensible nature Proves to be the difficulty. Of what do I speak? That which you humans call "Laughter." The sensation which Threatened to overpower As I witnessed my captain's Encounter with the tribbles. Association with the Iotians Also resulted in a Serious conflict With such emotion.





A gangster, indeed! I have been told that I, too, possess humor In a "dry sense", I believe It is phrased (?) It seems such opinion Must be accepted. After all, I do not deign to argue With my captain. There have been moments When I have observed Humans Indulge in this emotion And felt a curious desire To accompany them. It would appear that Laughter is contagious. Non-sequitur--But nevertheless True. I shall have to correlate Such facts and opinions and Attempt to arrive at a Logical conclusion. In the interim, If you will exeuse me? It seems that I am experiencing This rather shocking urge To . . .

> -- Spock (As dictated to Rowena Warner)







WHEN IT HURTS TOO MUCH TO CRY by Moria Washburn

Captain James T. Kirk sat at the desk in his quarters, staring blankly at a mound of final reports. He was in a state of bemused exhaustion.

Three days before, the *Enterprise* had reached space-dock around Terra, her five year mission finally completed. Their reception had been, to put it mildly, exuberant. Starfleet Command had gone out of its way to publicize the successful completion of the mission, promoting the maximum amount of favorable propaganda for the Service.

Kirk and his officers had been media-hyped into HEROES and were received with an almost rabid admiration by the public at large. Every time Kirk left the safety of his ship he had to sign autographs and dodge teenage 'gropers' trying to cop a quick feel--or convince him to participate in a mutual slow one.

After the second day in port, McCoy had adamently proclaimed that he wasn't leaving the ship again without a disguise and that he was going to start growing one immediately. And poor Spock had been looking rather unnerved ever since a hysterical fourteen year-old female had grabbed him around one leg, kissing his uniform and screaming endearments. It had taken two security guards and a hypo to pry her loose from the Vulcan's knee. Kirk grinned in spite of himself; Spock's expression during the episode would remain one of his most cherished memories.

However, nearly everyone else in the *Enterprise* crew seemed to be enjoying the notoriety and hero worship. Indeed, some rather unscrupulous individuals were taking great advantage of all the fringe benefits. Chekov for instance....

All the dementia had finally culminated, if not concluded, the night before with the official reception and banquet. It had been equal parts frightening and depressing; all those admiring, calculating, sycophantic faces beaming at him along with the full realization that the mission was really over did nothing for Kirk's spirits. And today he was feeling the depression and discontentment even more. For the first time in his life, he felt cut adrift, uncertain of the direction his future would take, uncertain even of what he wanted from the future. He was being pressured to take a promotion which would mean the end of his days as an active-duty commander. But even if he refused the promotion, there were no assurances that he would be able to keep command of the Enterprise, or get another ship. Command seemed to be pushing for younger officers these days.

The door buzzer sounded stridently, shattering Kirk's uncomfortable reverie.

"Who is it?" he snapped irritably.

"Spock, Captain."

Kirk's mood immediately improved; Spock's presence always made things seem better. "Come on in, Spock."

The Vulcan stepped into the room almost hesitantly, his hands folded behind

his back. "I do not wish to disturb you, Captain. If you would prefer that I..."

Kirk shook his head. "Sit down, Spock. Your interruption is more that
welcome. I was just...thinking--not very pleasant thoughts."

Spock raised a familiar, comforting eyebrow. "Yes, I quite understand, Jim. Times of transition are usually difficult." He paused, then slowly pulled his hands from behind his back. There was a small giftbox in one of them.

Kirk eyed the blue and gold box curiously as his friend sat down. The Vulcan

avoided Kirk's eyes as he carefully set the box before the Human.

"Perhaps this is not the best time to present this to you, Jim, but it is something I wish to do while we are all still together. There has been little opportunity before this, and there will be even less after today...when we will be deeply involved in the final details of emptying the ship and dispersing the crew." Spock finally looked up, meeting Kirk's soft eyes. "This is a...remembrance, Jim, of all our years together."

Kirk stared at the Vulcan, willing himself not to embarrass them both with some overt emotional display. He was surprised and deeply touched that the highly reserved Vulcan should make such a gesture. He looked down at the tiny box and gently lifted its lid. There was a ring inside. As he slowly lifted it out, his eyes grew wide and dark.

"It is a symbol from Earth's past," explained Spock helpfully when Kirk failed to show any further response. "I researched it for its meaning--"

"I'm afraid you didn't do enough research," interrupted Kirk. His voice was slightly strangled and his face had turned noticably pink. "Or at least I hope you didn't..." He paused, studying Spock's innocent and bewildered expression. "No. No, of course you didn't."

"I...don't understand, Jim. Are you not pleased with the symbolism?" Spock

eyed Kirk's flushed face with concern.

Kirk bit his lower lip and turned still pinker. "Uhm, well...I appreciate the fact that you gave it to me, Spock. And I, uh, appreciate that I think you meant this ring to mean. But as for what the ring itself means—as I said, you must not have done enough research."

Spock actually began to look distressed at Kirk's expression. "I...rather carefully researched the mid-20th century origin and meaning of the symbol

engraved on the ring and found it to be highly appropriate."

"But you didn't research its subsequent history, did you?" Kirk fingered the ring almost distastefully. "Particularly the...late 20th century..."

Spock stared at the inexplicably offensive ring in Kirk's palm and almost frowned. "Sir, there is a limited number of pre-21st century records on any subject, but I carefully examined those records concerning this symbol and they are all of a positive nature. There is no record of this symbol beyond the date of 1987, but I have...had...no cause to suspect that there was anything...wrong... with it."

Kirk sighed and gingerly placed the ring back into its box. "Maybe this symbol didn't survive in any of the *official* records, but it sure as hell survived in the folklore from *that* period." He firmly settled the giftbox lid, hiding the repugnant ring from view. "But then there's no reason you should be familiar with all the horror stories from--" Kirk paused abruptly.

"Spock, uh, where did you get this...ring, anyway?" he asked, trying to

sound casual but failing. "Did, uhm, anyone you know see you buy it?"

Both Spock's eyebrows rose at Kirk's alarmed--and alarming--tone. "I had them made by a jeweler on Finster III. I was alone. I wished it to be a... surprise. Why are you so concerned?"

Kirk visibly relaxed. "On Finster III. Good. That's 'way out in the boonies. Probably no one would even know about this symbol there. And that's been over six months ago anyway, so it looks as if you got away with-- Wait a minute!"

Kirk's eyes bugged as he realized what Spock had said. "Them?! What do you mean-them?!!"

Spock shifted uncomfortably in his chair. "I wished to make a remembrance of this to all of my closest...to all of those who have been..." He paused, seeking a way to express his intentions without using any emotionally suggestive words. "I...had a set of eight made."

"Eight?!" gasped Kirk. "Where are they?! Who else did you give one of these...

these things to?!"

Spock flinched back into his chair at Kirk's tone. "The others...were given to McCoy, Scott, Uhura, Sulu, Chekov, and...Chapel. Jim, why is this so import...?" "That's only seven!"

"I kept one for myself. Jim, why...?"

Kirk goggled. "Didn't anyone else get excited over this?"

Spock blinked. "I doubt that they have seen the rings yet. Yours is the only one I wished to present...in person. The others I sent through the postal system. I deposited them in the main office yesterday; they should be delivered--"

"This morning. Ohmigod. What time is it?! We've got to try to get them back before anyone sees them!" Kirk shot to his feet.

Spock rose also, still utterly bewildered. "It is 11:23. Jim, it is

illegal to tamper with--"

Kirk was already heading for the door. "I'll take McCoy, Sulu, and Chekov. You get the others. And if anyone's seen it...apologize and grovel."

"Grovel? But Jim, WHY--?" But the door had already closed behind Kirk.

Kirk slipped apprehensively into McCoy's Sickbay office, having already checked the doctor's quarters with no result. His eyes lit up with relief at the sight of a small blue and gold giftbox sitting unopened on the desk. He was about to grab it and retreat when the sound of a door opening behind him caused him to freeze.

"Hello, Jim," McCoy ambled in from one of the examination rooms. "Something I can do for you, or did you just come by to shoot the breeze?" He strolled

over to his desk.

"Uh-h-h," said Kirk, his golden tongue failing him for once. "Are you all right?" McCoy frowned. "You're awfully pale."

"Me...pale? Uh...well, uhm..." Kirk tried to inch his hand toward the box

while McCoy's attention was focused on his face.

"Bet I know what your problem is. You spent too much time last night being bored to death by all them high honchos, didn't you?" McCoy smiled and sat down at his desk. "I watched you trying to be polite and drinking like a fish. Just think, you'll have to listen to that crap αll the time if you're stupid enough to accept--" It was then that he noticed the small box.

"Oh yeah, Nurse Vance said they'd delivered a box for me." He picked it up.

"Wonder who'd be sending me presents?" He opened it.

Kirk closed his eyes.

There was a brief, smothering silence, then McCoy gasped sharply. "What in the goddamn hell is this?!"

Kirk opened his eyes to see McCoy glaring in rage at the gold and black ring. "Do you know what this is, Jim?! Do you know what this is?!! What kind of a pervert would send me something like this?!!"

Kirk's eyebrows went up in sudden hope. He looked down at the dropped box and saw a blue card peeking from under the gold ribbon. He slid his hand over in desperate stealth and slipped the small sentiment card out--barely in time.

"I'm gonna find out who the bastard is who sent this, and when I do...!!" McCoy grabbed the box and shook it vengefully. "He's not gonna get away with this!! I'll find out who he is if it's the last thing I ever...!!!" He

spluttered into incoherence.

Kirk crumpled the card tightly in his fist.

Spock buzzed the door to Christine Chapel's quarters. After a brief wait, the door opened. She stood there, her eyes puffy and red, her face grim.

"Nurse Chapel, I--" Spock began.
She slapped him with enough force to stagger him, and closed the door in his

Spock stood with a hand on his numb cheek and wondered why she could never strike him that hard when he was coming out of a healing trance.

When, after repeated buzzings, Chapel still refused to talk to him, Spock headed for Montgomery Scott's quarters. He buzzed for entrance three times and receiving no answer, finally concluded that Mr. Scott was not in.

Spock hesitated for a moment, then, remembering all too vividly Chapel's violent and irrational reaction to his innocent gift, he decided that it was imperative that he at least attempt to get the box back before Scott opened it. He had no desire to be attacked by the engineer as well--one assault per day was quite sufficient.

Using his command override, Spock ordered the door open and quickly slipped inside. On the desk was a small pile of letters--and the giftbox. Nothing had been opened; obviously Mr. Scott had not yet examined his mail. Spock picked up the box hurriedly and turned to beat a hasty retreat.

"Mr. Spock? Is that ye?"

Spock barely restrained himself from jumping in guilty surprise. He turned

back slowly.

Scott was standing in the now open bathroom door, naked, with a look of absolute perplexity on his face. It was no doubt a singular experience to step out of the sonic shower and find a slightly greener-than-usual Vulcan in one's quarters.

"Ah, Mr. Scott...I was not aware that you were here..." Spock's voice

faded as he realized how peculiar that sounded.

Scott frowned, digesting the statement and trying to decide how to inquire about Spock's presence without being openly offensive. "Uhm. Is there...something you wanted, Mr. Spock? Anything I can...do for you?" His gaze dropped to the box clutched in Spock's hands.

Spock noted the direction of Scott's stare and silently called himself a few choice Pre-Reform names for not having hidden the box behind his back. "Ah... Mr. Scott...I...have a...gift for you. I wished it to be a...surprise." He paused trying to think of a way out of his predicament. He found himself wishing that he had Kirk's talent for mendacity.

Scott looked dumbfounded. "Ye were sneakin' in t' leave me a *present*? Well, I'll be damned." He started to step forward, then remembered his nudity. "Ach, just a minute, Spock; I'll get m' robe." He disappeared back into the bathroom.

Spock quickly turned his back, opened the box and removed the damning ring. He hesitated, trying to think of something--anything--to replace it with, then in desperation he pulled off his Starfleet Academy ring and dropped it into the box.

"Spock?" Scott had reappeared out of the bathroom with a green and yellow

robe wrapped around him.

Spock gripped the gift ring tightly in his left hand and turned, holding the box out with his right. Scott took it, smiling broadly, obviously pleased and

touched by the sentiment.

"I have t' admit I'm surprised, Spock. I wouldna have thought that something like this would have occurred t' ye. I want t' thank ye verra much." Scott opened the box.

Spock gripped the gift ring still tighter as Scott pulled out the substitute ring. "Why...Spock...This is your command ring! Ye're givin' me your command ring?!" Scott was flabbergasted.

"Yes, Mr. Scott. I, er, I wished to give you something to remind you of our years together on the *Enterprise*." Spock choked to a stop, rather ill at having

made such a personal statement.

Scott stared at him almost suspiciously. "But your command ring? Why your

command ring?"

Spock clenched both hands behind his back, the cause of this whole mess biting into his flesh as his strength deformed it. "I...I... rarely wear it...only on special occasions...such as last night, is it of any..." Spock stopped abruptly, realizing how that sounded. "It is a very personal item and I wished--" And that was ever worse. Spock actually blushed.

But Scott was now smiling. "I thought ye were lookin' a wee bit too green around the gills, Spock," he chuckled. "I understand now, laddie. I saw that blonde anglin' for your attentions last night; I knew that one had more in mind that just wrappin' herself around your kneecap." He reached over and clapped Spock

on the shoulder reassuringly.

"Ye'll get over it. And if *she* doesna, well, gettin' rid o' your class ring isna goin' t' keep her from snaggin' ye. Just because it's traditional for Starfleet officers to' give their rings t' their intendeds doesna mean that it's the only ring a lady'll take. But I'll be glad t' keep it for ye until the whole thing blows over."

"Yes, Mr. Scott. Thank you, Mr. Scott," said Spock numbly as he backed

anxiously toward the door.

"Oh, and Spock," called Scott as the Vulcan turned to make his escape into the corridor, "next time remember t' use some precautions and ye willna have anythin' t' worra about the mornin' after."

Spock stood in the corridor for some time, gathering his composure and trying not to dwell on the impression with which he had left Mr. Scott. Considering the <code>Enterprise's</code> highly developed grapevine--not to mention Starfleet's--he almost shuddered to think of what kind of story was going to grow out of this morning's conversation; Montgomery Scott was not known to be a great keeper of secrets.

Receiving a querulous glance from a passing crewman, Spock swiftly pulled himself together and proceeded to his last giftee. He buzzed Uhura's door and received an immediate answer, almost as if she had been waiting for him. She stood there in a flowing gold and red gown, looking disturbingly bright and attractive. Spock prepared himself to get slapped again, but Uhura just smiled at him.

"Why Mr. Spock, what a pleasant surprise." She looked at him, eyes glowing with mischief. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

Spock cleared his throat uncomfortably. "There is something I would like to discuss with you, Lieutenant."

"Oh? Well, in that case, why don't you come on in?" She stepped to one side and waved for Spock to enter.

Spock arched his eyebrow and walked into her quarters, scanning apprehensively for the giftbox. It was on the table beside her bed. Open.

"...said the spider to the fly..." Uhura's sultry voice was directly behind

"I beg your pardon?" asked Spock, startled. He turned to find her almost touching him.

"Is *this* what you wanted to discuss, Mr. Spock?" She held up the ring, the gold glinting between her slender, dark fingers.

Spock swallowed uneasily. "Yes...I see that you have already..." He actually

lost track of what he was trying to say; Uhura was standing altogether *much* too close. He began backing off unconsciously, explaining as he retreated. "I was concerned that you would be upset by the symbol on the ring, although I certainly meant nothing insulting by presenting it to you. However, Captain Kirk has informed me that it is a most inappropriate and possibly offensive symbol. I assure you that I was not aware--" He bumped into the ornamental screen separating the main room from the bedroom.

Uhura had advanced as Spock retreated; he was now effectively trapped between the screen and her. The only route of escape was into the bedroom. He decided to

hold his ground.

She leaned toward him, smiling strangely. "Offensive? Oh, I don't know-it's really more a matter of how a girl chooses to look at it. $\it I$ didn't find it offensive--not at $\it \alpha l l$ --sugah." She put one hand on his chest and leaned up toward

his face, her breath sweet against his lips.

Then her smile softened and she pulled away. "However, I know you well enough by now to realize that you didn't mean it have that meaning. Besides, this symbol wasn't nearly as well known in Africa as it was in Western Europe and North America, so I don't have the same culturally inbred revulsion as Captain Kirk must have." She gave Spock's cheek a sisterly pat, pivoted gracefully and headed toward her desk, thoughtfully presenting Spock with an avenue of escape.

Spock pried himself loose from the screen. "Lieutenant Uhura, what is the

meaning...?"

She looked back over her shoulder and grinned. "Why, Mr. Spock! What a

question to ask a lady!" she exclaimed in mock indignation.

Spock self-consciously straightened his tunic and began edging toward the door. "Forgive me for asking, Lieutenant. I am most relieved that you are not unduly disturbed by my...gift." He reached the door and paused. "Since the ring is so unfortunately inappropriate, I will gladly dispose of it for you--"

Uhura laughed. "Are you kidding? A girl never returns a gift from a gentleman. Besides, I may want to blackmail you one of these days...or nights. Have a

good day, Mr. Spock...sugah." She winked at him.

Spock backed hastily out the door.

-- and directly into Kirk.

The Human staggered and Spock grabbed him reflexively. Kirk looked up into the Vulcan's flushed face worriedly as he pulled free of Spock's convulsive grip. "What's the matter, Spock? Has anything--anyone...?"

"All is...well, Captain," answered Spock quickly, forestalling Kirk's anxious

queries. "Although some of the reactions have been...unusual. Why--?"

"No time now; we'll talk later." Kirk grabbed Spock's arm, hustling him down the corridor. "I just now managed to get away from McCoy. If he *ever* finds out it was *you...*.You finished?"

"I...finished?" Spock blinked in momentary confusion. "Ah...yes, I have

contacted all of my--"

"Then go check on Chekov--quick. I'll get Sulu." Kirk shoved the nonplussed Vulcan toward Chekov's quarters, returning stagger for stagger in the process.

Kirk paused before Sulu's door, watching Spock make his rather unsteady way down the corridor, then buzzed for admittance.

Response was alacritous. "Come in."

DAMN! thought Kirk apprehensively as he stepped through the door; Sulu was seated at his small desk with the giftbox before him. He had the card in his hand.

Kirk's eyes widened in hope--the box hadn't been opened yet. "Uh, good morning, Mr. Sulu."

Sulu rose in surprise. "Captain--good morning, sir. Is there something I

can do for you?"

Kirk stared into the bright, wide-awake eyes of his helmsman. Obviously Sulu had not over-indulged at the banquet. Unfortunately. "Yes, Mr. Sulu. I...uh... I...need your final report on Helm status."

Sulu looked even more surprised. "I logged it into the computer yesterday, sir, before I went off-duty." He reached toward his computer access terminal.

"I'll be glad to call it up for you--"

"No. Uh, that is...it's not in the computer. I've already asked for it,"
Kirk lied quickly, once again grateful for his long and extensive experience at
it. "I wouldn't have come here asking you for it if it were in the computer, now,
would I, Lieutenant?" Kirk raised his eyebrows questioningly.

"Uh, of course not, sir. But I did enter it." Sulu pulled back from his

terminal, knowing better than to double-check the captain's assertation.

"Yes, Mr. Sulu, I'm sure you did," Kirk smiled his most unctuous smile. "It's probably the computer's fault."

Sulu's eyes widened. "The computer's--? Uh, yessir. I'll, uhm, get my copy of the report for you." Sulu turned his back to look in the tape file behind him.

Kirk knew he had only seconds; Sulu kept *very* neat files. He swiftly slipped the top off the box, reached in, and snatched the ring out. He barely got the top back on and the ring behind his back before Sulu turned around.

"Here you are, sir." Sulu looked uncertainly at his commander's flushed face

as he handed over the tape. "Are you feeling all right, Captain?"

"Of course, Lieutenant. Why do you ask?" Kirk casually took the tape in his free hand.

"Uh, no reason, sir." Sulu diplomatically decided to change the subject while he was still ahead--and while he still had a head; it was no secret among the crew that the captain has been excessively snappish recently. He had noticed Kirk's eyes wandering to the small card laying on his desk, so he took the opportunity to pick it up and use it as a diversion. "Someone apparently sent me a present for some reason; I can't imagine why. I was just about to open it when you came in, Captain," he said conversationally as he started to open the card.

"Oh? Well, I really don't want to bother you any longer, Mr. Sulu, so I think I'll just be going now." Kirk began to back hastily toward the door, then stopped and grimaced as he realized it was too late; Sulu had already read the card.

The helmsman's eyes had become amazingly round and his jaw dropped. "Listen to this!" he exclaimed, forgetting both military protocol and his earlier discomfort with Kirk's strange behavior. "'In remembrance of our years of service together.' It's from Mr. Spock! I don't believe it!"

Kirk closed his eyes, feeling a wave of depression as Sulu opened the box.

There was a momentary thick silence. Then Sulu spoke.

"It's...it's *empty*." His voice had a plaintive, hurt edge to it. "Why would he give me an empty box? And...'In remembrance of our years of service together'...?"

Kirk opened his eyes to see Sulu staring woefully into the blank box. He looked up at Kirk almost beseechingly. "Do you suppose he was trying to make a

comment on my...my performance as an officer?"

"NO, of course not, Sulu." Kirk hurriedly tried to come up with a reasonable explanation—and failed. "He has only the highest regards for you...he's often told me so, in fact. No, it's probably just his idea of a...ah...a joke."

Sulu looked dumbfounded. "A joke? Mr. Spock?!"

"Yes, of course. Uh, surely you've noticed how...how, uhm, Human he's been acting lately. Well, ah, he probably thought you'd find this very, uh, funny. It sounds like something he'd do for a joke..." Kirk began backing rapidly for the door again, miserably wondering just how much damage he had done to Spock's reputation.

"Mr. Spock? Acting Human?" Sulu watched his commanding officer retreat, coming to the uncomfortable conclusion that the ship's two top officers had simultaneously cracked under the strain.

"I'll make sure this report is properly entered into the computer myself, Mr. Sulu," said Kirk, waving the tape in the general direction of the desk as he

turned and slithered guiltily out the door.

Spock glanced back over his shoulder in time to see Kirk disappear into Sulu's cabin. For a moment he indulged in horrid fantasies concerning the nature of the crime he had inadvertently committed. He still had no idea of exactly what his error was, but considering the bizarre reactions of the four people who had seen the rings so far, he was certain it was a blunder of grand magnitude.

He resolutely swept the morbid thoughts from his mind, and grimly pressed the buzzer to Chekov's quarters. After three buzzes with appropriately long intervals between and no answer, Spock began to hope that Chekov was not in his cabin. It would make it infinitely easier—not to mention less painful—to retrieve the box. With trepidation, too vividly recally his last such decision, Spock prepared to open the door with his command override.

Suddenly the intercom beside the door squawked into life. "Yeah? Vhat d'ya

vant?" The voice was both sulky and slurred.

Spock raised an apprehensive eyebrow--if indeed he had ever lowered it in the last hour. "It is Commander Spock. I need to speak to you on a matter of...some importance."

"Spock?! Uh, yesSir, Mr. Spock, Sir. Ah, uh, just a moment, Sir. Sh-h-h-sh!

I mean, uh--" The intercom went silent.

A few moments later, the door opened and a very flushed, disheveled Chekov stood in the doorway, wearing a pastel pink, ruffled negligee. Spock's eyebrow

rose even higher as he eyed the roses embroidered around the neckline.

Chekov's eyes followed Spock's gaze down to his chest, and the young lieutenant blushed even brighter. "Ah, Mr. Spock, I, uh, see you've noticed my robe. It's, uh, it's the...the newest style in men's nightvear from New Paris..." His explanation ended in a high, breathless whisper.

"I think that is another Human style that I shall not be emulating," responded Spock, rather at a loss for an appropriate comment and wondering why the navigator

was whispering.

Chekov's eyes bugged, giving him rather the expression of a trapped bushbaby.

"No, Sir. Uh, vhat vas it you vished to see me about, Sir?"

Spock shifted uncomfortably. "May I come in, Lieutenant? This is something better discussed in private."

Chekov bit his lower lip, strengthening the impression of a prosimian a bay.

"Uh, yessir. Of course, Sir. Ah, some in. Sir."

He moved, reluctantly Spock thought, out of the doorway and allowed the Vulcan to enter.

The outer room was as disheveled as its occupant, but Spock rapidly spotted a small mound of mail cassettes on the heaped desk. He did not see the giftbox. "I wished to ask you about your mail this morning, Mr. Chekov."

"My male, Mr. Spock, Sir? My male vhat?" Chekov blurted before realization hit him. Spock would not have believed it possible, but the Russian blushed even

brighter. Not even Kirk with a sunburn matched Chekov's color.

"Oh! You mean my mail! For this morning? It's over there, Sir. Vhat about it?" Chekov swished in his long, flowing skirt over to the desk and began to dig out tapes. "No, vait a minute, Sir, this is from yesterday, and this is from... let me see...today's mail must be this pile..."

Spock winced as cassettes began clattering to the floor. "I am only interested in a...small box, Mr. Chekov. It was...misdelivered and I am trying to locate it."

Chekov stopped scrabbling around on his desk. "I didn't get a box, Mr. Spock. I'm sure of it; I alvays open boxes as soon as I get them. It must have gone somevhere else." He began to look relieved. "If that's all you vanted to know, sir..."

Spock actually frowned, completely unnerving Chekov again, who managed to spill another week's worth of tapes on the floor. "If the box in question did not come

here, then where?"

"There's no telling. The Federation Postal System is alvays losing things. Everybody knows that. Uh, Sir." Chekov hastily ducked onto the floor and began

noisily gathering up the tapes.

Spock noticed with a fragment of his attention that Chekov was making an unusual and unnecessary amount of noise, but most of his attention was consumed with wondering--and dreading--where the box had been delivered. Now he understood why Captain Kirk always used Universal Parcels.

"Mr. Chekov, it is imperative that I locate that box as soon as possible. Would you mind if I called the postal office from your desk?" Spock was already

approaching the desk console.

"Ah, uhm, of course not, sir," Chekov gasped as he crawled out from under the desk, abruptly deserting the recovered tapes. "Uh, vould you mind terribly, Sir, if I, uh, vent back to, ah, bed, sir?" He staggered to his feet, trying to keep his robe wrapped around him, and unintentionally mooning Spock in the process.

Spock raised the other eyebrow as he curiously regarded the lieutenant junior grade's exposed posterior and his excessive number of 'sir's. "Of course, Mr. Chekov, please return to your rest. You do seem rather nervous. I understand that sleep deprivation can have that effect on Humans. Please do not let my presence interrupt you further." Spock turned to the console.

There was a high-pitched giggle behind him, and he glanced over his shoulder to see Chekov hastily retreating behind the ornamental screen. Spock was briefly concerned about the lieutenant's odd behavior, then dismissed it for later consideration as he made contact with the San Francisco Central Post Office.

"Central Post. How may I help you?" The woman's voice was typically bored

and indifferent.

"This is Commander Spock. I wish to speak to someone regarding the delivery

of six packages to the USS Enterprise."

"Any mail to be delivered to Federation starships comes under the Military Postal Security Act of Stardate 1004.26 and must be registered with the Starfleet Postal Security Office. Office hours are 11:00 to 16:00 mondays through..."
"I am calling about parcels that have already been sent..."

"I'm sorry, sir, but all information regarding Starfleet mail is strictly confident -- "

"I sent the parcels, and one of them has been lost. Must I--"

"Just a moment, sir, I'll switch you to Mr. Chaffee." The intercom made a number of unaesthetic blurping and clinking noises.

"This is Central Receiving; Joe Chaffee speakin'. Can I help ya?"

"This is Commander Spock. I am calling in reference to six packages that I mailed to the USS Enterprise, only five of which arrived."

"Well, that sure don't seem right. Ya sure?"

"Yes."

"When'ja send 'em?"

"Stardate 9423.14."

"That's yesterday afternoon."

"Wait-a-minute, I'll check with Delivery." Spock was put on 'hold' and treated to ten minutes of twanging Gran-ol-Op/Denebian fusion-pop revival music. "Yeah, here it is. Five packages delivered this mornin'."

"There were six." Spock rubbed his aching ears.

"Nope. Only five."
"I mailed six."
"Ya sure?"
"Yes."

"Hmmmm. Well, lemme see. The packages were registered in the name of a Commander Spock, *USS Enterprise*. Ya checked with him? Maybe he forgot to send all six--"

"I am Commander Spock!"
"Of the USS Enterprise?"
"Yes!"

"Listen, Commander, it's none of my business, but why'd ya send them packages to yer own ship in the first place? I mean, ya just coulda delivered 'em yerself, in person. I don't know why people don't stop and think. Ya could take a lesson or two from the Vulcans, know what I mean, Commander?"

Spock restrained an urge to attack the console. "I shall...certainly... consider it, Mr. Chaffee. That will not, however, solve the present problem of a

missing parcel."

"Yeah, but it shouldn'ta got lost in the first place. Ya Starfleet people gotta show a little more responsibility, ya know; after all, we all pay enough for ya. I mean, sendin' the first package to the *Intrepid* through the Federation Postal System was logical, but the five to the--"

"The Intrepid?!"

"Yeah, of course, one to the *Intrepid*, five to the..."

"I did not send one to the Intrepid."

"Yeah, ya did. It says right here--"

"I sent six to the Enterprise."

"Ohhh. Ya mean yer missin' sixth package is the one on its way to the *Intrepid*. Ya see, it really wasn't lost all. The Federation Postal System never--"

"I did not send it to the Intrepid!"

"Listen, Commander, yer gonna have to learn to be more careful with yer address labels. I mean, how d'ya expect us to deliver 'em if ya mess up the labels?" "I did not--" Spock paused and reached grimly for his Vulcan calm. "Mr. Chaffee...thank you for your...time. I will contact the postal officer of the

"Won't do ya no good. She's in the repair depot at Starbase 14. Them Vulcans

Chaffee...thank you for your...time. I will contact the postal officer of the Intrepid myself--"

go through more ships--"

"I am aware of the present state of the *Intrepid*, as well as how she came to be that way." Spock clenched his fist. "Why will it do me no good to contact the

Intrepid's postal officer?"

"Don't get testy, Commander. I'll tell ya if ya'll just give me the chance. All mail to the *Intrepid* has been diverted to the central office on Starbase 14 for redistribution from there. Yer Ms. Paula Checker will probably get her package by tomorrow morning at the latest."

"Ms...Paula...Checker...?"

"Ooooohhh, Pavel, darrrrling! Do it again!"

"Shhhhh! Not now!!"

Spock's eyes widened. He looked over his shoulder, past the ornamental screen, and saw--

Both eyebrows suffered seizures and he swallowed convulsively. "Please excuse

me, Mr. Chekov! I was not aware--!"

"The name's *Chaffee*." There was a nasty chuckle from the intercom. "I getcha *now*, Commander. Don't ya worry about that sixth package; the Federation Postal Service always delivers. And in the meantime, ya've still got the other five to, ahem, fall back on..."

Kirk sat at his desk, nervously spinning the ring he'd confiscated (stolen)

from Sulu. It made a pleasantly mellow whirring sound as it rotated, the shiny simulwood desk surface reflecting its bright metal in flashing golden arcs. He stared at it, fascinated by its obscene beauty, and wondered when he'd get the call from Security informing him that someone had killed Mr. Spock--maybe Chekov, but more probably McCoy if he'd figured out who sent him that nasty little surprise. In any case, Kirk had a gut feeling that something horrible had happened; the Vulcan was long overdue.

Kirk was just getting ready--steeling himself--to call Security when the door suddenly slid open and Spock stalked in unannounced. Kirk stared at his friend anxiously as the Vulcan crossed the room without a word, and sank stiffly into a chair. Spock's expression was calm and very controlled, but his eyes had the glassiness of shock. His right hand was bandaged and it was obvious that he'd

changed his uniform.

"Spock?" questioned Kirk tentatively, almost timidly. "Are you all right?" Spock just stared at the ring on Kirk's desk as it decelerated to a limping, clattering standstill. Then he extended his left hand and dropped another ring beside the first. It was badly bent and the black enameling around the symbol was webbed with tiny fractures. Kirk could see the name 'Scotty' engraved on the inside of the twisted band.

He looked up at the impassive Vulcan and began to wonder when Security would call to report Scott's murder. //I had a feeling that I should deal with Scotty myself--it was just a little too damn late when I thought of it. So much for the JTK lightening hunch legend.// "Uh, Spock," he began, wondering how best to approach the subject. "About Mr. Scott...

Spock's eyes widened and his color rose noticably. "What has he told you?"

//Surely the story can't be out already!//

"Told me?" Kirk repeated, relieved. //Apparently Spock hasn't killed him completely.// "Nothing. I, ah, was just wondering how he...is?"

"In very high spirits, I should imagine. It's just a matter of time and the proficiency of the illicit conversational network." Spock went back to staring at the ring.

"What?" But it was obvious that the Vulcan had no intention of elaborating. "Listen, Spock, just where have you been, anyway? I've been worried sick. I tried calling Chekov's quarters over an hour ago and all I got was a 'Thisintercom-is-not-in-service-please-try-again-later' recording." Kirk leaned forward, determined to get some answers.

Spock winced. "Mr. Chekov's intercom has sustained a certain amount of... damage. I have already dispatched a maintenance crew to deal with the problem."

"A maintenance *crew* for an out-of-order intercom? Isn't that a little excessive?" //I'll get the whole story out of you yet, my old friend.//

"It is not simply the intercom." Spock appeared to be contemplating his navel. "Actually, the...entire console assemblage will need to be...replaced."

Kirk's gaze immediately dropped to Spock's bandaged hand. //I'll be damned. But I should have realized that he wouldn't have done his hand that much damage be merely cracking somebody's skull.// "Uh, why did y--"

"I regret having kept you waiting, Captain; however, I felt that I should see to the maintenance crew and...freshen up...before reporting back." Spock studiously kept his eyes lowered. //And to recover some remnant of my oncerenowned Vulcan control.//

"Where did you get your hand bandaged?" Kirk thoughtfully decided to postpone the more sensitive questions for a less sensitive time.

"Sickbay, sir." Spock sounded faintly surprised. //Where else does he think I would go? The computer lab?//

"You, ah, didn't see McCoy, did you?" asked Kirk apprehensively. //If you did, that hand's probably sewed up with catgut.//

"It was he who attended to my...injury." //With malicious good humor.//
"Didn't he seem...upset to you?" //Spock, you must have a guardian angel...
or whatever.//

"Indeed not. He seemed quite...cheerful, in fact." //Planning his revenge,

no doubt.// Spock refrained from figeting.

Kirk raised his eyebrows in relieved bemusement. "I have to admit I'm a little surprised." //Boy, am I surprised!// "I was afraid that McCoy would still

be...disturbed over the ring."

"I believe that Dr. McCoy has deduced that I sent the ring and understands that it was merely a-misunderstanding." //Which does not change the fact that he intends to 'get even' by way of some elaborate practical joke. I know him too well. I will have to watch my every step from now on; not even the end of this mission and my leaving the Enterprise will stop him. Refined sugar in my herb tea; a quik-stik label reading 'buried treasure-finders keepers'; itching powder in my shorts; a 'whoopee cushion' in my bridge chair. For this offense, I'm sure he will feel that those are too lenient-and he never uses the same 'joke' twice anyway. Perhaps it would be best if I kept my guard down and simply allowed him to get it over with. Minimize the unpleasant anticipation. But I doubt he'll let me off that easily. And the damage to my already severly injured dignity if he chooses a public demonstration! ...perhaps an obscene holographic poster like the naked Tellerite he sent to Mr. Scott...on the projector in one of my Academy classes...?!//

"Spock? Spock." The Vulcan felt his shoulder being gently shaken. He

looked up to find Kirk standing over him, obviously worried.

"Are you sure you're all right, Spock? You seem awfully upset." //Shit! That was stupid, James T. Why the hell did I have to use 'upset'? Just look at that expression freeze up. The great mask of Vulcan rises again.//

"I am perfectly all right, Captain. I am certainly not upset. I am Vulcan. I was merely...thinking. I have that right. //Shameful! Shameful! He reads me like a primary school computer program. 'See Spock. See Spock frown. See Spock jump. See Spock 'beat the crap' out of Chekov's console. Poor Chekov. Poor Chekov's friends—all three of them. Poor Spock. See Spock dis—

grace his heritage. Shame, Spock, Shame!'//

Kirk had backed off diplomatically, and was now sitting on the edge of his desk, studying Spock with a good deal of concern. //I've never seen him look so miserably uptight. Wonder what's going on behind that cold face. Got to open up the lines of communication somehow; get him to tell me what's wrong.// "You know, Spock, it's funny how something that seemed so serious can slide over into being rather, well, funny. I think I've made way too much out of this whole ridiculous incident. It obviously wasn't as important as I thought."

Spock's eyes flicked up. //You think not, James Kirk? A rare error in

judgement, Captain.//

Encouraged by Spock's brief eye-contact, Kirk went on. "When you told me how McCoy had calmed down, I realized that this symbol," he picked up the undamaged ring, "wasn't quite the horrible boojum I had made it out to be. Oh, it still has that immediate gut-level impact on those of us raised with the old horror stories, but the real terror and disgust have faded, finally, over the long years since that time." He paused, half waiting for Spock to ask 'why' for the umpteenth time, but the Vulcan sat coldly immobile, staring abstractedly past Kirk's shoulder.

"Ah, well, I imagine you're interested in that folklore I mentioned this morning, aren't you?" No response. "It, uhm, all started back in the late 20th century. There was this organization—I forget what it was called—that was made up of people in the stratosphere of Human intelligence. And this," Kirk idly stroked the ring's oddly stylized M and the globe above it, "was their emblem."

"It was actually quite a nice, harmless organization, but in the late 1980's

many people began to see it as very elitist...and possibly dangerous. As the paranoia preceding the Eugenics Crisis developed, people began to think that these high-IQ individuals were gathering together for some covert purpose, something that definitely wouldn't be in the best interests of the 'ordinary man'. There was a lot of sensationalism connected with a sperm bank of intellectually superior donors and the talk within the organization about the positive aspects of...of eugenics." Kirk swallowed uneasily, despite his pose of unconcern, discussing this subject was making him distinctly queasy.

"When the 'Supermen' cropped up and started seizing power, people automatically assumed that this organization had been breeding them all along, and the hysterical fear arose that the average-intelligence majority was going to be reduced to slavery and eventual extinction. This symbol became associated with the idea of carefully controlled breeding and intellectual elitism, and anyone wearing it was assumed to be a potential superman or breeder of one." He sighed and began to

toss the ring from hand to hand uncomfortably.

"There are some hideous stories about what happened in the 1990's to anyone caught wearing one of these, or anyone who was suspected of belonging to the

organization. If you were smart back in those days, you played dumb."

He glanced back at Spock to find the Vulcan finally looking directly at him, but the expression in the eyes was as cold and distant as it had been five years ago at the very beginning of their relationship. //Surely he can't be angry with me. All right, so I let my gut-reactions run away with me (again); he ought to be used to that by now. I know I made fools of both of us, and probably embarrassed him whether he'll admit it or not, but he must understand why I over-reacted so badly, that it was just because I care for him so much. How the hell do I get through to him?// He sat miserable, bewildered, feeling the emotional distance between them expand a light year per second.

Spock stared back, not really seeing the Human at all. His gaze was inner-directed. //Interesting. After all these years among Humans, I can still make a blunder of this magnitude, distress so many around me, and vitiate my honor so thoroughly. All these years I was wrong about my Human half. I thought it would enable me to understand Humans better, to deal with them more effectively than a full Vulcan could, while still maintaining my dignity and identity as a Vulcan. Instead I have compromised my principles little by little over the years until now there is almost nothing left of my chosen self. My thinking patterns are

becoming irratic, emotional, disorganized; Human.

//I am a fool, not for having been unaware of the folklore surrounding that symbol, but a fool for having ever thought to present it as a...a sentimental memento in the first place. I have stolen, lied, and placed myself in a hopelessly compomising situation. McCoy, Scott, Uhura, Chapel, Chekov; all have seen me falter. Chekov's companions. And somewhere, someday, an individual named Paula Checker may open that accursed sixth box and begin this travesty all over again. Even if I could...live this down, which I doubt, I could never be free of the dread of that sixth box. Oh Surak, Father of Logic, if there is Ultimate Sin for a Vulcan, I have committed it.//

His vision cleared and he found himself gazing into Kirk's soft, questioning eyes. //And you, James Kirk, I have allowed you much too close. You know far too much of me, far more than is decent for a Human to know of a Vulcan. And I know too much of thee, feel too much for thee. I value thee more than I value my parents, more than I value myself, even more, perhaps, than I value Vulcan. And that is an obscenity. A crime for which I must make amends. I must return to the place of my birth, of my choosing, and cleanse myself, detoxify myself of the poisons fed into me by my Human half, purified by fire and deprivation. I am Vulcan; I shall remain Vulcan at the cost of my life.//

"Spock?" Kirk began, his voice puzzled and anxious. "Please let me---"

"Three-word catch phrases have as little meaning as four-letter words." Spock stood up, ignoring the hurt in Kirk's eyes. "It is 14:11. I respectfully remind the Captain that there are many duties to perform before leaving the

Enterprise -- for the last time."

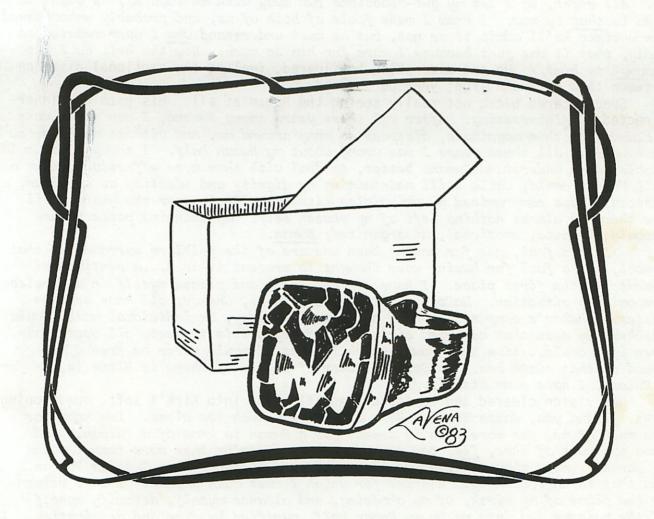
"Uh, of course, Spock." //Those three-word catch phrases do mean something, Spock. They mean a hell of a lot. 'Let me help'. 'I love you'. Please let me say them.// "But I want us to discuss this later, all right?" Kirk had also risen to his feet, trying to maintain eye contact with the Vulcan, but Spock had already turned toward the door and Kirk could not see his face, his eyes, as he answered.

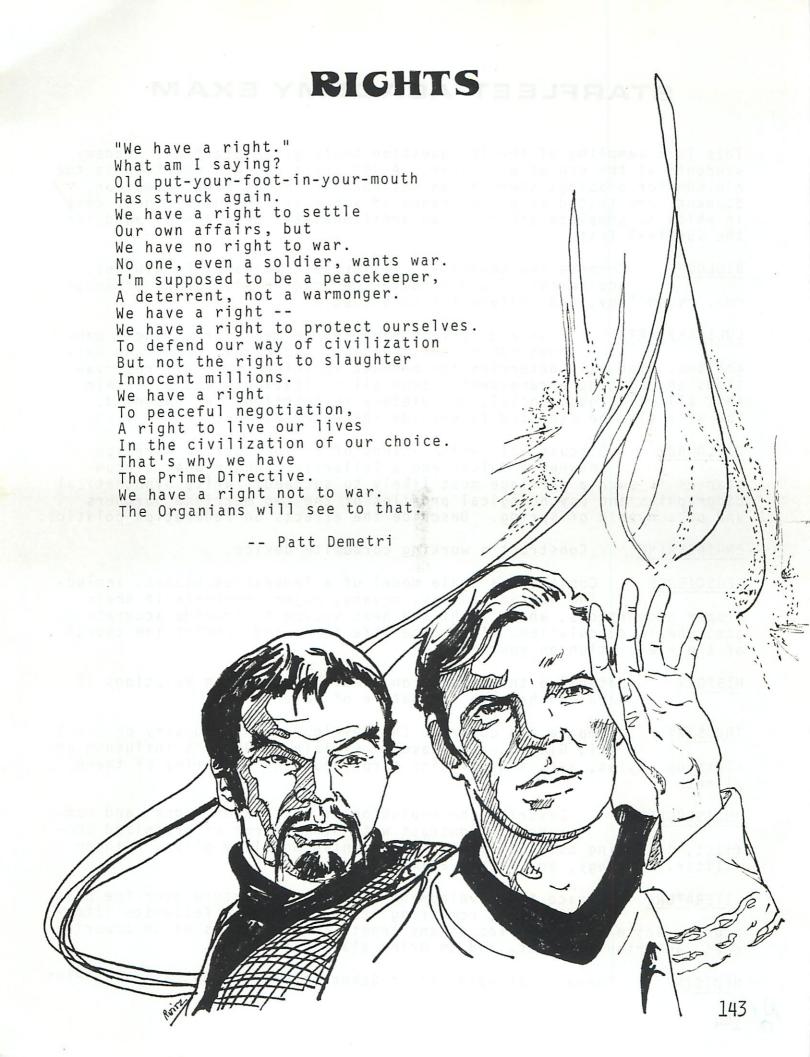
"As you wish, Captain." //There will be no 'later', James Kirk. By the time the last of our duties are attended to, we will have been officially dismissed from the Enterprise. Once off this ship, you are no longer my commanding officer and you will have no official hold over me. There will never come a time for us again; the Spock you knew will no longer be.//

"Live long and Prosper, Jim," Spock murmured to himself, far too softly for

Kirk to hear, as he strode out the door.

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STARFLEET ACADEMY EXAM

This is a sampling of the 100-question tests given Starfleet Academy students at the end of each year. A 75% score on each question is the minimum for passing; there is an optional 400-point bonus question. Students are tested on a wide range of subjects, and have ninety days in which to complete the test; an additional ten days are allowed for the Survival Test.

BIOLOGY Compare and contrast: Tellarites, Vulcans, Excalbians, and Hortas. Explain fully the interrelationships of anatomy, psychology, and culture for each species.

CULINARY ARTS

Plan and serve a nine-course meal for a single banquet for Humans, Vulcans, Andorians, Gorn, and Melkotians. You will determine the banquet location, make all reservations and seating arrangements, send all invitations, and ascertain that all religious, social, and dietary restrictions are observed. You will also be expected to provide the entertainment.

Discuss all ramifications of a hypothetical marriage between a Vulcan and a Tellarite. Under what circumstances is such a marriage most likely to succeed? Write hypothetical biographies and psychological profiles of the two marriage partners and of a hyprid offspring. Describe the effects on Federation politics.

<u>ENGINEERING</u> Construct a working corbomite device.

GEOSCIENCE Construct a scale model of a Federation planet, including active geology, oceans, major chemicals in their proper proportions, and a light and heat source to provide accurate atmospheric circulation. Introduce life forms and predict the course of their evolution on your model.

HISTORY Determine the effects on Romulan-Federation relations if Napoleon had won the Battle of Waterloo.

Compare and contrast the development of industry on Rigel VII, Gideon, and Thasus. Explain industry's influence on clothing styles, art, and politics throughout the histories of these planets.

JURISPRUDENCE Describe the evolution of justice on Andor, and compare and contrast with other forms of organized conflict, including but not limited to Organian morality plays, Klingon military strategy, and Terran animal shows.

LITERATURE

Trace the development of Orion literature over the past 3000 years, comparing it to Vulcan and Tellarite literature. Write three stories of any length in the styles of an Imperial poet, an Orion merchant, and an Orion slave girl.

MEDICINE There is an epidemic of Sakuro's disease on Daran V. Plan

and organize a quarantine of part or all of the planet. Give a complete mathematical description of the quarantine, a search for the source of the epidemic, and its effects on the economy.

MILITARY SCIENCE Devise a plan for conquest of the galaxy. Include all information on your sources of finance, supply, and popular support, if any.

MUSIC/FINE ARTS

Write a three-act opera tracing the course of Galactic history from the rise of Surak to a Federation/Romulan war ten years hence, which the Federation need not win. The music should be adaptable to English, Old High Vulcan, Officious Tellarite, Andorian, Gornese, Orionite, Klingoni, Romulan, and Organian.

NUMISMATICS Compare the origins and evolution of coinage on Organia, Neural, Romulus, and Gorn. Explain in terms of the theo-philosophical systems of each culture.

PLANETOLOGY

A hypothetical nebula will be assigned to you; using the complete description provided, trace the development of solar and planetary bodies, if any.

RELIGION Completely describe the history of religion on Tiburon, concentrating particularly on the lives of Zora and Sevrin, and how these two have affected Tiburon's history and relations with other planets.

TOPOLOGY Construct a three-dimensional map of the galaxy, marking points of interest. The curvature of space should be apparent in your map.

VULCANOLOGY

Compare and contrast Vulcans, volcanoes, and the deities associated with volcanoes of various planets. Your essay may take any form, including verse, drama, parody, etc. You may solicitathe advice and assistance of Vulcans.

This is the study of physical and chemical systems in the complete absence of water. Give a complete description of all known life forms in the methane oceans of Cygnia Major, and compare these with those of Excalbia and Regulus II.

Devise a plan for the domestication of the Denebian slime devil. Discuss its possible uses, benefits to society, and impact on Federation society and economics.

BONUS QUESTION

It is estimated that humans, Vulcans, Andorians, and Tellarites together can see an almost infinite List as many as you can.

⁻⁻ Submitted by Stephen Mendenhall

THE WRITTEN WORD IN THE 23RD CENTURY

by Stephen Mendenhall

Books are not often mentioned in Star Trek episodes, but when they are, interesting questions come to mind. Some of the questions are easily answered, but in the words of the Orion spy in JOURNEY TO BABEL, sometimes you must "find your own answers."

There are good reasons for the Enterprise crew's reliance on computers-they are fast, accurate, and store vast amounts of information in a compact space. But books have several advantages. They are rel-

atively small, portable, and do not require any power source.

In BALANCE OF TERROR Kirk hands Spock a book while they are discussing the comet Icarus 4. The book's title is probably something like ASTRONOMICAL PHENOMENAE NEAR THE ROMULAN NEUTRAL ZONE. But its presence in this particular scene is stil anomalous. The computer and viewscreen were close by and operable; in this scene, the book is not necessary—the computer could give the same information just as readily. The book would only be necessary if the computer were not available.

Amanda's love of books has had good effect on Spock, and Sam Cogley's book collection certainly hasn't hindered him any. Are they unusual in their love of books? I hope not. By the way, what was the

title of the book Sam Cogley gave to Kirk?

The first alien writing mentioned is "Nightingale Woman", written by Phineas Tarbolde on the Canopus planet in 1996. What Gary Mitchell was reading was a microfilm recording, but it probably appeared first in book form. Since the date is so early, he must be an alien rather than a human colonist. He may be a Skorr, and of the same race as Aurelan (seen in the animated episode YESTERYEAR). Mitchell says it is one of the most passionate love sonnets of the past couple of centuries. How well does Mitchell know Tarbolde and his works? Could Tarbolde have been an eccentri- millionaire in love with a Regulan eelbird?

Kirk quotes an alien novelist in CITY ON THE EDGE OF FOREVER, who was famous for recommending the word, "Let me help," and he lived on a planet of the farthest star in Orion's belt. Now, that star is large and hot, like Rigel, so there must have been some artificial engineering done on the planet to make life forms safe, protected from the excessive ultraviolet radiation and other hazards posed by such a star. (This must also have been done for the planets of Rigel, Arcturus, et al).

Was the novelist an Orion? Maybe not. The star Chi Orionis is a solar-type star about thirty light years from Sol, so it could have a habitable planet which is the home planet of the Orion Empire. Since the star Kirk pointed out is about 1500 light years away, it is unlikely that the Orions would have expanded that far without attempting first to conquer nearby worlds such as ours.

The Preservers had an obelisk which malfunctioned at just the wrong time, giving Kirk amnesia and the Enterprise crew a big headache. The writing on the surface was in a musical writing system, and unfortunately, whenever we get a good look at it somebody is standing in

front of it, making it difficult to get a definitive list of symbols

and thereby try to make sense of the system.

Why didn't the Preservers make certain that the knowledge of the meaning of the inscriptions would not be lost? Perhaps the medicine chief only knew the spoken forms, and didn't know what the writing meant. Perhaps the writing was for the benefit of space travelers. And perhaps the Preservers wanted to see whether the various tribes settled on the planet would ever develop writing systems on their own. In CLOUD MINDERS, we seem to have some actual writing: Vanna's dress has four interesting symbols on it. Unfortunately, they're all completely different, which makes unlikely the idea that they are a phonetic spelling of the name Vanna. They probably aren't numbers, since the other Troglodytes don't wear them. Other questions about her dress arise: Why is she so much better dressed than the other Troglogytes? Who made the dress? Why is it so clean? What technological equipment do they have for themselves? What is the history of the planet?

In CATSPAW, Korob was about to tell Kirk what he had read when Kirk interrupted. Had he visited our planet? Or did one of the advanced races of our galaxy write some scholarly treatises which Korob

read?

Zarabeth (ALL OUR YESTERDAYS) mentioned science fiction stories, but not TV shows. What was the technological level of Sarpeidon in Zor Khan's time? It's hard to say, as there are a number of contradictions in the evidence, the most glaring being the brick wall through which Kirk stepped. How could that brick wall have been built without anybody noticing the time warp? Even if the timewarp was created after the brick wall was built, there would be people accidentally finding it, and small animals, birds, and blowing leaves would constantly be coming through. Or, let's say the time warp led only from a past era to the library, or the reverse--but not from one past era to another. Then how did Zor Khan work the time warp? Insufficient data! Another Preserver experiment, riddled with inconsistencies.

The Platonians gave McCoy a written scroll supposedly written by Hippocrates -- but if it was that old, it would have crumbled as soon as

Parmen picked it up.

But in PLATO'S STEPCHILDREN another written work was never mentioned, and it should have been. Plato's REPUBLIC is the earliest model for a Utopia, and the Platonians should have made some effort to create that society. Now, it is difficult to have much of a society with less than 40 people, but couldn't they reproduce, or at least clone themselves? They could achieve starflight and immortality, but they couldn't increase their population and emulate their favorite Greek's most famous work? The answer though, is fairly simple--they were too lazy to begin any project that takes a certain amount of forethought, planning, and hard work.

The Fabrini Book of the People is probably something like a combination of the Bible and the Encyclopedia Britannica. But several questions remain unanswered. Just how much technology could they record in one book? What will the level of technology of the people be once they land on Yonada? The asteroid itself can't land; how will they get down to the planet? Who, if anybody, will stay on the ship? Why was Yonada chosen? How did Spock know the Fabrini language?

On Omega IV, we have another one of the Preservers' fun-and-games experiments. This time the Yangs have their American documents and

the Komms probably have various important Chinese books and documents. But they are so busy fighting and engaging in primitive agriculture that they don't have the time or the inclination to make sense of their documents. They go through the rituals because they think they're supposed to, and merely abiding by the rituals will gain the favor of the god(s).

We got a look inside one of the Yang books and saw something that looked like a Vulcan. The book could have been a Bible, but perhaps not. It could have been a dictionary of angels and devils, or

even a Kraith novel.

About the year 2150, the starship Horizon arrived at the planet Sigma Iotia. The ship had suffered severe damage, and the crew decided to disembark and settle the planet below. So they left it in orbit around one of the moons; it crashed on the moon's surface a few

years later.

On the planet, they found a situation similar in some respects to Europe in 1790. The major civiliations were all centered on one isolated continent. The other continents were inhabited by peaceful primitives of various types, as well as occasional colonists from the technologically advanced civilizations. The dominant powers were the nations of Woksraa and Leeko; both had recently gone through major revolutions and civil wars, and the culture was on the verge of a dark

After setting up a base on one of the primitives' continents, where they wouldn't be so easily noticed, the crew of the Horizon thoroughly studied the dominant civilizations, and decided to save the planet from the oncoming dark age. So they chose one of their books as a guide to modeling a new culture. They then put themselves in influential positions and started forming societies modeled after Chicago gangs--only instead of a few blocks, the smallest of the countries covered hundreds of square miles. The entire land surface of the world had been divided up and assigned to groups of crewmembers by lot. Captain Kresge happened to get Leeko, the largest country of the world, and he took the original copy of The Book with him, invoking the idea of Ránk Has Its Privileges. However, copies of the book were made for

use by the other groups of crewmembers for their countries.

At the time these events took place, the cultures were at the bare beginnings of industrialization. The Horizon crew made arrangements for allowing technology to advance, while not endangering the stability of the governments. While individual leaders came and went, the forms remained constant. Though the gangster governments were not perfect, the populace was constantly reminded of the even worse chaos and terror of the period just before the Horizon crew came. However, it appears that only some of the government leaders were aware that the Horizon men and women were from outer space, since if they were, their prestige would have been so enhanced that only they and their descendants would have remained in power. From what Oxmyx and Krako didn't say, it appears that some, at least, of the Horizon crew were overthrown and replaced by natives, and that the populace was just as willing to support a native as a Horizon crewmember.

* Ref: CHICAGO MOBS OF THE TWENTIES, edited by the Chicago Historical Society, Doubleday & Co, NY, 1992, cxii + 3287 pp + maps, illustrated index; \$49.95

THE CASTING DEPARTMENT:

SCENES WE'D LIKE TO SEE

by STEPHEN MENDENHALL

Mark Lenard holds the distinction of being the only actor to portray three different aliens in the worlds of Star Trek (the Romulan Commander in BALANCE OF TERROR, Sarek in JOURNEY TO BABEL, and the Klingon Commander in STAR TREK: THE MOTION PICTURE). Herewith are some suggestions for a number of other Star Trek films, each featuring Mark Lenard portraying yet another alien. Most of these plot lines make the basic assumption that Starfleet will realize that Kirk is too valuable to leave behind a desk, and that he will be given permanent command of the Enterprise. The last few scenarios are set in alternate universes, and in two of them the regular Enterprise crew doesn't appear at all. Of course, it is also possible that William Shatner et al, may take different roles in the Star Trek Universe. Grace Lee Whitney a green Orion slave girl? Majel Barrett a female Harry Mudd? Nichelle Nichols her sidekick? Who knows! Ponder, and enjoy!

- 1. QUERY INTO PRECEDENCE: A Capellan with apparently legitimate claims to the throne of the Ten Tribes appears, and Kirk must find out if the Klingons are involved. Ricky Shroeder as Leonard James Akaar Mark Lenard as Qaab
- 2. THE VENGEANCE OF ORION: Orion agents have kidnapped the Tellarite emperor and a Vulcan ambassador who happens to be Sarek's sister. Mark Lenard as the Tellarite Emperor Kafeeggheink Francine York as Spock's aunt, T'Mame Frank Gorshin as the Orion ringleader, Udhoj
- 3. I, MIRI: On Miri's planet one adult has survived by remaining in a hibernation unit, and now he claims the right to rule the planet.

 Mark Lenard as Aanol
- 4. THE NAKED GODS OF EDEN: Followers of a strange religion hinder Kirk's attempts to find a missing Federation scientist. For once, the followers are not all malevolent and Kirk has no need to violate the Prime Directive.

 Mark Lenard as Kinressa, the Andorian scientist
- 5. YESTERDAY'S CITADEL: Mudd's women and their husbands anow have their own mining company, and with the help of a Rigellian scientist they are accompanying an important ore sample to Rigel V. Unfortunately, the ship has been sabotaged, and Kirk must rescue them from Rigel VII.

 Mark Lenard as the Rigellian, Tziani
 Roger C. Carmel as Harry Mudd
- 6. SWORD OF ALTAIR: Kirk must investigate the revolutionary fervor sweeping Marcos XII and the disappearance of an Altairian athlete. Mark Lenard as the Altairian, Nugan

- 7. UNDER THE HOLLOW SKY: Kirk's attempts to uncover a Klingon espionage ring in the caves of Marcos II are hindered by the planet's totally unionized society.

 Mark Lenard as Shrethin, a native of Marcos II
- 8. DAGGER OF THE KING: The colony world of Cygnia Minor orbits a gas giant planet called Cygnia Major. The colony world is suddenly hit by periodic radiation storms from the giant planet, and the Enterprise is called in to help.

 Mark Lenard as Jijk, the Denebian governor of the colony
- 9. THE ARENA ON THE EDGE: A federation scientist abandons a vital project when he discovers an ancient, alien portal into other universes, and Kirk must find him.

 Mark Lenard as the Deltan scientist, Qint
- 10. THE SAVAGE GAMESTERS OF TYPERIAS: While on shore leave Kirk becomes personally involved in a murder mystery involving a K'normian with no past and an insane Tellarite.

 Mark Lenard as the K'normian, Ilw'janpalab
 Bernadette Peters as the Tellarite, Jshael
- 11. THE RECEPTION: High comedy erupts at a reception for the delegates of a race of centaurs when a Klingon disguised as a Catullan attempts to defect. Lucille Ball, Richard Pryor, Redd Foxx, Gilda Radnor, Pat Morita, Mark Lenard, Sid Caesar, Imogene Coca, Bob Hope, Rich Little, Orson Welles, George Burns, and Danny Thomas as the Centaurs.

 Steve Martin as the Klingon spy
- 12. THE SAVAGE CLOUD: The Enterprise returns to Ardana to accept delegates from the new government, but politics, romance, and farce become intertwined as Droxine and Vanna vie for Spock's affections. Mark Lenard as a Federation diplomat, a native of Polaris IX
- 13. A JOURNEY BY ANY OTHER CHANGELING: The Gorn are attempting to buy Federation secrets from Orion, and Kirk must visit the Orion home planet in disguise to stop the Gorn.
 Mark Lenard as an Orion, Piotbaaj
- 14. THE CITY OF THE PRESERVERS: Kirk explores a new planet which has a culture similar to the Arab colonies of East Africa in the 14th Century.

 Mark Lenard as a Preserver
- 15. MUDD'S DOOMSDAY SYNDROM: Harry Mudd's attempts to turn the Doomsday Machine into an amusement park are thwarted by mysterious deaths and disappearances which Kirk must investigate.

 Mark Lenard as the Federation's chief investigator, a Regulan named Injii

 Roger C. Carmel as Harry Mudd
- 16. THROUGH THE ZONE OF DARKNESS: The Romulans have defeated the Klingons in a major war and the Enterprise is sent through the Neutral Zone to obtain a new treaty. Loni Anderson as the Federation's chief diplomat, a native of Rigel V

named Ta'sivil George C. Scott as the Romulan Emperor, Ptalzeed

17. AT THE HEART OF THE EMPIRE: After the events of ST:TMP, the USS Constitution is sent with the Romulan starship Inexorable to deposit a joint occupation force on the Klingon home world, and to find the Klingon Emperor. The is the movie originally considered for production as a three-hour extravaganza with lots of big-name stars and more action than the storyline implies.

Captain Ulysses Dante Executive Officer First Officer Science Officer Chief Medical Officer Chief Nurse Engineering Officer Chief Security Officer Weapons Officer Communications Officer Records Officer Contact Officer Helm Officer Navigator Chief Petty Officer Chief Yeoman Environmental Control Officer Duty Officer Personnel Officer Transporter Chief Hangar Deck Chief Chief Diplomat Second Diplomat Third Diplomat Chief, Federation Occupying Forces Commodore Admiral Head of the Federation Council Romulan Commander

Romulan Diplomats

Members of the Klingon Court

Klingon Emperor

James Earl Jones Richard Chamberlain Cicely Tyson Jean Stapleton Richard Burton Elizabeth Taylor Bill Cosby Tom Selleck Angie Dickenson Bill Bixby Florence Henderson Myoshi Umeki Henry Winkler Brooke Shields (as a Deltan) Farrah Fawcett (as a Deltan) Bo Derek (as a Deltan) Diana Ross Vicki Lawrence Cheryl Ladd Michael Horse Charlene Tilton Robert Guillaume Carol Burnett Sydney Poitier

William Marshall
Ossie Davis
Ruby Dee
Lou Gossett, Jr.
Katherine Hepburn
Robert Redford, Linda Evans
Marlon Brando
Mark Lenard, Bette, Gloria
Swanson, Larry Hagman, & others

18. THE PLAID LAGOON: The largely unexplored planet Maynark IV has been colonized by natives of Coridan, whose genders can be either male, female, or huimale. A passenger shuttle crashes on an uncharted island, and the only survivors are three preadolescent children, of of each gender. In the following months and years, the children grow, and learn the pleasures of love and romance in this idyllic setting. Brooke Shields as Tianasu Christopher Atkins as Dionosu Willie Aames as Adonasu Mark Lenard as the chief of a mysterious, savage tribe

- 19. WHO MOURNS FOR SPOCK'S SQUIRE?: In the Kraith universe, Spock and his young squire crash land in a shuttle on Berengaria VII, 2,000 miles away from their destination, a mysterious cave guarded by a caste of Andorian priests.

 Mark Lenard as the chief priest, Shrelinv Phillip McKeon as Spilk
- 20. PATTERNS IN THE MIRROR: In the Mirror Universe, Kirk and Spock visit Tiburon to enlist the aid of the Empress in their rebellion against the Empire. But then they are caught up in a deadly game of cat-and-mouse, with Zora XXXII pitting her latest lover against Kirk and Spock as she attempts to find a lost treasure ship marooned on one of the planet's 91 moons. Phyllis Diller as Zora XXXII · Mark Lenard as her lover, Eitiard, a rich merchant of Algol XI
- 21. THE CITY ON THE EDGE OF THE VULCAN RING: In an alternate universe where the Romulans have conquered Vulcan, but not Terra, a rebellion begins.

 Mark Lenard a Lakat, the Romulan Military Governor

 Leonard Nimoy as Spock, the leader of the Vulcan underground

 William Shatner as Kirk, the Federation Espionage Bureau agent
- 22. AT THE SHORE LEAVE NO ARMAGEDDON: Siruk, the first disciple of Surak, leads the followers against the last stronghold of those who reject logic.

 Mark Lenard as Siruk



CONVENTIONAL ADVENTURES

-- OTHERWISE KNOWN AS "RAIDERS OF THE MIDWEST"

by Catherine L. Whitehead

For some reason we had the idea that it would be a twelve hour trip. As was the case with the ill-fated August Party trip last year, our estimate was a bit off, but happily, this time we erred on the credit side. Trinette (Kern) picked Jayne Clary up shortly after three in the morning, then they drove over to my place because we were going to use my car again. Trinette had a luggage rack which fit onto the car with suction cups and straps, and it proved invaluable. Both Jayne and I had sent our luggage with someone who was driving up alone, but with a cooler, two art portfolios, assorted costumes and luggage, my trunk was filled to overflowing and the luggage rack was called into use. There were five of us travelling together in a Skylark. Skylark is ostensibly a five-passenger car, but whoever designated it as such never had to ride over the hump in the middle of the back seat. By the time we had picked up Tim Thomas and Dawna Snyder, it was about

5 AM, and our trip officially began.

We made very good time, leaving the Ohio Turnpike in favor of an Interstate a little after 9. We stopped for breakfast then, and while we were waiting for our food, Trinette pulled out a little surprise. She had made up a Mad Lib from the scene between Kirk and Spock in AMOK TIME, where Spock attempts to explain his insistent urge to return to Vulcan. For those who are so unfortunate as to be unfamiliar with the Mad Lib, it is basically a vignette, short story, or dialogue with certain key words left out. Without telling anyone the setting, the person writing the story calls for nouns, adjectives, verbs, etc., which are called out at random. Needless to say, you can get a pretty bizarre concoction by the time you're through. Fortunately, Trinette waited until we got back into the car before she read the thing, because we probably would have been thrown out of the restaurant for rowdiness. Trinette wisely read the thing in the parking lot, before we started the car--we were howling so much we probably would have ended up in a wreck.

The rest of the trip seemed to go pretty quickly after that, and we arrived at the hotel around two in the afternoon. The con committee, Gordon Carleton, Lori Chapek-Carleton and Paula Smith didn't have much planned for the first night, which was nice. It gave everyone a chance to hunt up friends and unwind before the planned events such as a quick sweep through the dealer's room. MediaWest attracts a lot of zine editors, so there were a lot of fine 'zines on sale. After putting a goodly dent in my wallet within two feet of the dealer's room door, I decided it would be cheaper to start hunting up some friends.

I ran into Martynn in the lobby, and she informed me there would be a dress rehearsal of our skit, GUMBIES OF THE LOST ARK, in her room at 5:30. Small problem there--my clothes and costume were still en route from Pittsburgh. The rehearsal was a good idea--most of the costumes were so creative and funny, seeing them cold the night of the performance would have been too much to take and the cast wouldn't have been able to deliver their lines through the laughter. For those unfamiliar with the GUMBIES, they were something concocted by Monty Py-Gumbies wear bandanas knotted in all four corners on their

heads, their pants legs are rolled up, they have a walk which has been described as a gorilla with hemmorhoids, they all have moustaches, male and female alike, and they aren't very bright. My luggage still hadn't arrived by the time of the rehearsal, which made things a bit difficult--not so much for the lack of the costume, but because by that time I had been wearing the same clothes for fourteen hours and was without fresh deodorant for the same length of time. I won't say I was gamey, but my fellow cast members showed a distinct preference not to be close to me, and large sections of paint were peeling off the wall where I was standing. Cheap stuff, obviously.

The Gumby skit was written by Bernie Davenport, with an able assist from Martynn, and rehearsals went pretty well, considering that some of the cast were seeing their parts for the first time. After the rehearsal, we went out to dinner, and glory be, when we got back to the hotel our friend had finally arrived with our luggage. After making breakfast arrangements with Jayne and Dawna, I took off for my

room, a shower, a change, and BED.

I had set my alarm for 7:30 Saturday morning, and had put the clock within 9" of my head, but I still managed to wake up all my roommates (thereby endearing myself to them forever) by not getting to the alarm in time. Breakfast at a nearby Denny's, then back to the room to assume my Klingon persona. Ann Wilson and I were scheduled to do a panel entitled, "What Makes a Nasty Nasty?" or, "Why Are Those Media Villains So Attractive?", and we had decided to do it in costume. Ann was dressed as an Imperial Guard. Unfortunately, our other two panel members weren't aware of our intentions, and showed up in mundane garb. No problem, though—the con is loosely structured in regards to dress. Some folks were in costume the entire length of the con, others spent most of their time in T-shirts and jeans. The atmosphere there was very relaxed.

The panel went fairly well, I thought. I'm no great judge of such matters, since it was the first time I had ever been on a panel. The other two panelists besides Ann and I were Carol Hines-Stroede and David Manship. David served as moderator, and did a very nice job of directing the discussion when it seemed to be hung up on one particular character or another. After the panel I made another Kamikaze run on the dealer's room, where I adopted a purple dragon with lovely blue eyes. After meeting some people I had been writing to for awhile, but had never had the chance to actually see face-to-face, I repaired to my friend's room for lunch. We had brought a four-cup hot-pot and

some of those lovely chemical soups and such.

After lunch I went to take part in a wonder Science Fiction Dungeon run by Ann Wilson. There were about ten of us in Ann's beginner's group. We lost one of our party on our trip through the dungeon (he was done in by a Klingon), but he was miraculously returned to us on the way out of the dungeon. After the D&D game, I talked to a few people, then went back to my room to dress for the dinner banquet--

dress as Sallah, that is.

I was met at the door of the banquet room by a party of Imperial Guards who were taking tickets. Woe betide anyone trying to sneak into the banquet! After the meal, they gave out the Fan Q awards, and after that, Hilton Street Blues was presented. It was written by Gordon Carleton, based on Hill Street Blues, and it was hilarious. Everyone arrested had some sort of SF or media background. Spock was arrested (and bitten) by Belker, who claimed that he had resisted arrest by trying to pinch him (his buddy got away after giving some cock-and-

bull story about a mechanical ricepicker), Ralph Hinckley...uh....
Hanley...uh...Smith was arrested for flashing his red long-johns in
the park, and Ford Prefect was brought in for hitchhiking. Chewbacca
was adopted as station mascot after being found wandering without a
collar (he was rescued by Indiana Jones). Great fun. The Gumbie skit
followed Hilton Street Blues, and was also a lot of fun.

After the Gumbie skit, we retired to Trinette's room (after I took a quick shower and made a fast change). I missed most of the costume call, but while we were in the room, we did another Mad Lib based on the scene in STAR WARS where Luke is given his lightsaber by Kenobi. One membrable line from that read, "Your father was fried by a former prune whip of mine named Darth Vader." My little purple dragon was thenceforth christened Prune Whip. Now if I can only find him a little black helmet and cape....

After talking awhile, we wandered around the lobby, met a group which was Denny's-bound and joined them. Denny's was not quite ready for us. After Denny's, some of us sat in the lobby and talked until

close to 2, and then we broke for bed.

Sunday morning I slept in until 8:30. Sort of wandered around the dealer's room for awhile, picked up my illustrated copy of Hilton Street Blues and sat inthe lobby reading it and chuckling. While I was enjoying it, an announcement was made that voices were needed for Gordon's slide shows of Supraman and City on the Edge of Whatever, and tryouts were being held in the con suite. I hustled up to the con suite (one taste of the stage and I was hooked) and got the roles of Versa (Ursa, the naughty lady criminal) and Era (Lara, Superman's Kryptonian mother); was one of the crowd in City, too. We had a readthrough of the scripts, then went to the luncheon banquet.

After the meal, "The Battle of MediaWest Con" was sung. A group of softball players had also been booked into the hotel during last years MediaWest Con, and there were some nasty confrontations between drunken softball players and people in costume. It says a lot for the con that the hotel welcomed the con guests back for this year while the softball players were informed they'd have to find other accomodations. A filksong had been written, describing the confrontations, and it was very good. After the singing, I went next door to the slide show. After that, it was back to the room for a quick change into my Corellian outfit for the Rebellion's Diplomatic Reception.

I finally got to see Mark Hyde's wonderful Chewbacca costume at close hand. It's a beautiful piece of work! After the reception it was dinner, and then on to Star Wrecked: The Commotion Picture. We saw the two-hour version. If you've never heard of it, it's a carefully edited version of the first Trek movie, which turns it into a musical, of sorts. A pirate chanty is sung during the Klingon scene, Spock hears Jeanette MacDonald singing the Indian Love Song while on Vulcan, the Vulcan shuttle arrives at the Enterprise to the Lone Ranger theme song, and Spock sings, "It's not easy, being green" after the effusive greeting on the bridge. There's lots more, but those are some of the highlights. After the movie, Jayne and I repair to Martynn's room to hear a discussion of the latest gossip on the new STAR WARS movie. When that subject wore thin, we did another pair of mad libs, both from TESB. The discussion group broke up around 3, and it was back to the room for five hours sleep.

Monday started off with the breakfast banquet. During the banquet, Joyce Yasner and Devra Langsam told us they were thinking of

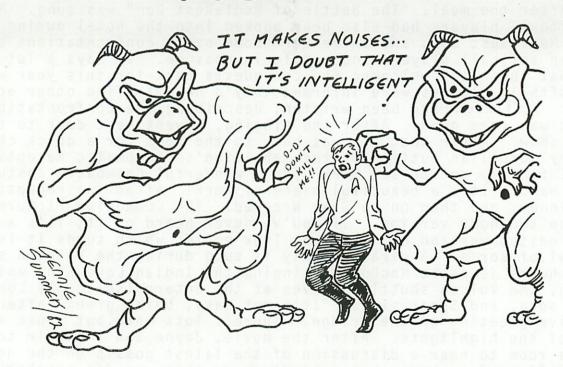
hosting the Media con in New York next year. They were calling for a vote, between Lansing and New York. When the votes were tallied that afternoon, it turned out that most people had opted for New York as next year's site. There has been some discussion in the past of having the con in the midwest one year and in the east the next.

After breakfast, we took in The Sound of Jaws. Yep, you guessed it--somebody turned JAWS into a musical. It was done live, and it was full of atrocious puns, which endeared it to my soul. I love puns--the deeper the groan, the more I like it. The songs were very nicely done, with lyrics sung to various tunes from The Sound of Music. After that, unfortunately, it was time to pack up, check out, make one last frantic charge through the dealer's room to shake loose any remaining loose change, hugs, tearful farewells, and a nine hour trip back home.

Needless to say, I'll be eagerly awaiting next year's MediaWest Con. The site might be different, but the same people will be involved, and it's the people who make that convention. By the way, Jayne thinks next year's con should be named, "The Wrath of Con." She also mentioned that a filking session held at 12 (mid-day) could be called a "con noonian sing." We left Jayne at a lonely gas sta-

tion in Ohio for that one.

asicus









THIS IS THE GROUP OF HARRIED PEOPLE WHO ORGANIZE AND PUT ON THE CONVENTION. (ALWAYS BE KIND TO THE COMMITTEE)

A CONVENTION ORGANIZER

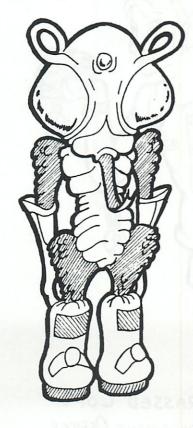
AREGISTRATION HEAD

Blower MAD COMMITTEE MEMBER (WATCH OUT FOR THIS ONE)

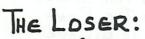
@ SECURITY HEAD

OFILM PROGRAM ORGANIZER

CONTEST BALL: ALL CONVENTIONS HAVE ONE SUCH CONTEST, FOLLOWED BY THE WILDEST DANCE OF THE YEAR.



HE WINNER:
YOU CAN ALWAYS TELL A COSTUME CONTEST
WINNER, BECAUSE THEY WEAR THEIR COSTUME THE ENTIRE CONVENTION. BUT THIS
IS NOT DUE TO ANY ATTACK OF EGO. IT'S
BECAUSE THEY CAN'T GET THE DARN COSTUME OFF WITHOUT THE HELP OF THE MAKEUP DEPARTMENT AT UNIVERSAL.



IN THE CONTEST, THEY ALWAYS UNDRESS THE SAME WAY ON STAGE.





FAN: THE WORD FAN COMES FROM THE WORD FANATIC; ENOUGH SAID ALREADY FAN (SERIOUS SCIENCE FICTION): THE ADOLESCENT MALE, SUFFERING WITH MYOPIA, APPEARS TO BE THE MAJOR PRACTITIONER OF THIS TYPE OF FANDOM. THEY ARE DEEP INTO ANY ESOTERIC FORM OF SCIENCE FICTION AND THEY FEEL THEIR LOVE OF SCIENCE FICTION IS UNSULLIED BY CRASS COMMERCIALISM. FANS COF THE GUEST STAR): THESE PEOPLE ARE THE EMBODIMENT OF BEINGA FAN. THEY GO FROM CONVEN. TION TO CONVENTION FOLLOW-ING THE OBJECT OF THEIR ADDRATION. DNE GROUP HAS BEEN KNOWN TO GIET STRANGE HAIRCUTS AND HAVE THEIR GARS SHARPENEDTO HONOR THEIR HERO.





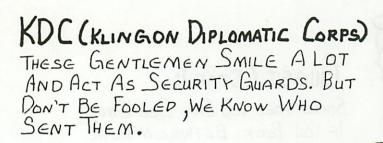
GUEST (STAR):

SOMETIMES YOU CAN SEE ONE, IF YOU PECK BETWEEN THEIR SECURITY GUARDS' LEGS.

GUESTS (HOTEL):

THESE POOR SOULS ARE PEOPLE, WHO MADE RESERVATIONS AT THE HOTE L
BEFORE THEY KNEW A SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION WAS MEETING THERE.







MEMORBIA JUNKIE:

THIS CONVENTION GOER SPENDS HIS ENTIRE WAKING HOURS IN THE DEALER'S ROOM. THEY ALWAYS DRIVE TRUCKS OR BUSES BECAUSE THEY NEED THEM TO GET THEIR CONVEN-TION PURCHASES HOME.



THESE MOCK BATTLES ARE SUPPOSED TO BE ONLY BETWEEN CONVENTION MEMBERS, BUT THEY USUALLY END UP AS HOTEL VERSUS STAR BATTLERS.



THE PARTIER:

A PARTIER IS FOUND IN ANY ROOM
THE HOTEL HAS HAD COMPLAINTS
ABOUT BEING TOO NOISY. IN THE HALLS
THEY CARRY 6 PACKS AND BAGS OF
MUNCHIES, GOING FROM DOOR TO
DOOR LOOKING FOR A PARTY.





REKKIE (CLOSET):

A CLOSET TREKKIE IS A QUITE OR-DINARY LOOKING SOUL. THEY HAVE NO DISTINGUISHING MARKS, EXCEPT THEY WEAR TRENCH COATS AND ALWAYS HAVE A SMALL CHILD IN TOW. WHEN ASKED WHY THEY ARE AT THE CONVEN-TION, THEY ALWAYS SAY THE CHILD WANTED TO CONVE. IT DOESN'T MATTER TO THEM THAT THE CHILD CAN DNLY SAY "MAMA", THAT'S THEIR COVER STORY. THEY ALSO DO VERY WELL IN STARTREK TRIVIA CON-TESTS. VIDEO GAMES JUNKIES:

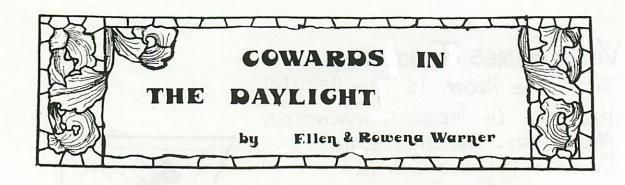
THE GAME ROOM IS THE NATURAL HABITATE OF THESE CONVENTION MEMBERS. THE DALY COIN DENOMINATION THEY CAN RE-COGNIZE IS THE QUARTER, AND THEY CARRY BAGS OF THEM EVERYWHERE. AWAY FROM THE GAME ROOM, THEY ARE CASILY IDENTIFIED BY THEIR CLAW-LIKE HANDS AND THE STRANGE NOISES COMING FROM THE GENERAL DIRETION DE THEIR MOUTHS.

ART & INKING
LAVENA KAN KIDD

CONVENTION RESEARCH
LUCKY KIDD

ELIZABETH KIDD
PATRICK KIDD
ED & LAVENA KIDD

@1982



Space -- The Final Frontier (Thank goodness!). These are the jaunts of the Scarship Exitprise. Its strange mission: to explore five new worlds, to ignore old life and semi-old civilizations...to cowardly go where no man has gone before... and will never go again.

Captain's Log. Stardate 3.1415926...After supper we're gonna go to Decembus IXVI. Why? Who knows?

"The Shadow knows."

"What was that, Mr. Mock?"

"Nuthin', Captain."

Decembus IXVI was not a thrilling planet; as a matter of fact, it was not even in the top 50 in the Neillson ratings, but VanIceberg called it home (plus a few other words). "...and I demand you find this creature, Captain, and zap it into the next galaxy."

Captain Shirk objected, "We do not 'zap' creatures any more, VanIceberg." "Indeed, Sir," Mock threw in his two-credits worth, "it is more like a 'screech' than a 'zap'."

"Well, you doesn't have to call it 'zap' and you doesn't have to call it

'screech', just as long as you mutilate it beyond recognition."

Mock attempted to look intelligent. "I am afraid that will be rather diff-

icult to do since I do not even recognize it now."

"Mr. Mock, that creature has destroyed my long-stemmed potted pink prize petunias, six bottles of Saurian brandy, plus three cockroaches, and last, but definitely least, 48 men and another one we weren't quite sure about."

"What did it do to your men?" Shirk questioned, hoping for some ideas to

use on his own crew.

"It slapped them silly! Do you know what it's like having 48 silly men

running around loose?"

Shirk gazed at his last officer meaningfully, "I have a pretty good idea." Mock reached into his non-existent pocket and pulled out his Vulcan mask. Fitting it in place, he arched one semi-shaven eyebrow and protruded his tongue. "Mr. VanIceberg, can you give us a description of.. The Thing?" The last officer flipped open a notebook and snatched the pencil from behind his ear. "Just the facts, ma'am."

"Well, it's large, shaggy, and multi-colored, and its face looks like this..." VanIceberg stuck his thumbs in his mouth and attempted to stretch his lips from

"Oh, gross!" Shirk shrunk, "Reminds me of a Vulcan during mating season."



"Captain, I'd hate to tell you what you look like when you're in..."

"Mr. Mock, that's quite enough."

"Yeah, well my little ears caught the sounds of you in your cabin with Lt. Aruhu. Kiss and tell."

"You didn't kiss."

"No, but I'm gonna tell."

"Mock, have you ever heard the old saying about skinny Vulcans with big ears?"

"No, I missed that one."

Shirk threw him a warning glance and Mock caught it left-handed. "They get 'em chopped off."

Mock straightened and threw out his chest. It fell to the floor with a soft thud. "Is that a threat, Captain?"

"You're damned right it is!"

"Okey-dokey, just checking."

He wandered off across the room, muttering and kicking a tin can. Shirk watched him stumble, fall flat on his face, and then crawl head first into a desk where he began examining some big bronze balls.

"Mr. VanIceberg, what do you call these big bronze balls?"

"We call them 'big bronze balls'."

"Ah so, logical."

McAnnoy was fidgeting, standing on one leg, then another, then on his head. "When do I'all get to say something?"

"All right, Cartilage, what do you want to say?" Shirk demanded.

"Nothin'," McAnnoy replied sharply, "I'all just wanted to know when I was gonna get to say it."

"Oh, I am overwhelmed by your profound thought," Mock feigned overwhelmness.

"Now, if we can get on with the matter at hand."

"Which hand?"

"Pick a hand, any hand."

McAnnoy held up his.
"Wrong one!" Mock yelled gleefully.

"I'all got a question."

Mock grabbed his stomach. "Oh, be quiet my beating heart! The good doctor

has a question! When McAnnoy speaks--everyone gets sick."

The "good doctor" threw him a sharp glance which struck the Vulcan just behind the left ear. "Now, maybe you'll pay attention, you pointy-nosed Xerox photocopier." He turned to VanIceberg and fell down. "You'all got any bodies lyin' around here--other than mine? I want'a take a peek at 'em and see what made them tickless."

"Yeah, we had one that died silly. He's over there in the fridge, on the first shelf behind the tuna salad, on the second shelf behind the Arm & Hammer baking soda, on the..."

Shirk collapsed, "Oh, gross!"

Mock's face turned greener. "Captain, I have two suggestions: (1) We get the hell out of here!"

"What! And shirk out duties?" Shirk smirked, then promptly fell into

Mock dragged him out patiently. "(2) Then I suggest we locate this creature and eliminate its adverse effects on the inhabitants of this planet."

"Ohhh, listen to those 50-cent words!" McAnnoy jeered. "The Amazing Muck!"

"That's Mock!"
"Mock's muck!"

"Any you're..."

"Tsk, tsk, children," Shirk interrupted slickly, "haven't I told you to confine your arguments to your Old Maid games? Cartilage, get to your fridge;

Mock, lead the way into the caverns."

"Why do I have to lead?" Mock mourned.

"Because I'm the Captain and you're already silly, so I don't think the creature can do much more to you."

Mock did as he was told, but purposefully stumbled, causing Shirk to fall

over him and therefore take the lead, head-first.

McAnnoy's voice rang out in the fridge. "Anyone for a B.L.T.?"

"Oh, gross!"

Mock and Shirk sneaked through the caverns on their tip-toes, Shirk on his tips and Mock on his toes.

"Man, what do you think you're doing? Get off my toes!"

"Oh, are those yours, Captain? I was wondering how mine had grown so large."

Suddenly an alert rang out through the caverns. Rang! Rang! Rang!

"It's the pomegranate and puce alert! Everybody down!"

VanIceberg came running up, spitting nails.

"That damned creature just stole the thingamagig off the john!"

"Oh, no!" Mock groaned, "You mean we're johnless?"
"It couldn't happen at a worser time!" Shirk cried.

"Why do you say that?" VanIceberg queried.

"Well, it must have been a worse time because nothing bad ever happens at a good time, for if something bad happened at a good time, then the good time wouldn't be a good time, it would be a bad time, and if..."

"Careful, Captain," Mock interrupted sternly, "You're beginning to sound

logical, and we all know how dangerous life becomes when you get logical."

Shirk sighed, "I guess now is the time I'm supposed to walk down that deep, dark, spooky tunnel and become the courageous, wise, and totally invincible captain."

"You got it, baby," Mock grinned.

"Like hell, too!"

Shirk pulled out his Fischer Price talkie-walkie. "Shirk to Sot. Shirk to Sot. Yahoo, Sotty, are you there? Get your wee bairns on the other end, or your other end on the wee bairns, whichever comes first." Shirk was amused (and amazed) by his wit.

A voice jumped out of the talkie-walkie, as the body wouldn't fit, "Cap'n,

didn'a ve know better'n ta bother me whilst I'm on the john?"

"At least you have one!" Shirk snapped back. "Now, get your john down here and fix ours."

Minutes later the transporter beam ripped the air, ricocheting off the walls and finally coming to rest on Mock's feet.

"Hey, get off my feet!" the last officer screamed.

"Hey, get off my head!" Sot bellowed. He stood and began brushing the footprints out of his hair. "Whatcha need, Cap'n?"

"I've got a problem."

"Didna we all!" he glared at Mock, "some more than others."

"VanIceberg will explain it to you." Shirk sighed again, "I have to go off

and play the wise and brave captain."

Mock began crooning "The Impossible Dream." Strings of the Terran Philharmonic Orchestra were heard in the background. All ears turned towards the heavens.

"Mock," Shirk cooed in amazement, "sometimes I think you underestimate yourself."

"Never, Captain, never."

They started through the tunnel, but Mock suddenly stopped. "Him, are we going...In Search Of...Creep Face alone?"



"What's the matter, Mock, don't you think we can handle one little old creature by ourselves?"

"No."

"You're right."

They screamed in unison. "Help!!!"

The transporter effect blinded them as 5,381 expendables appeared on the scene.

"Don't you think that's a bit ostentatious?" Mock asked.

"You can't have too many expendables," Shirk replied. Suddenly screams ring out and 27 of them fall over dead. "See what I mean? Okay, men, gather round. Not that close! Now, all of you know you'll never leave this planet alive, but what the heck. You gotta grab all the gusto you can, and while you're at it, grab that thing that broke the john."

10,709 feet went scampering in all directions.

"Oh, I just love your words of inspiration." Mock clasped his hands and sighed, "Almost makes me wish I were expendable."

Shirk rubbed his hands together and grinned evilly, "I think I can arrange

that."

Mock backed away. "I said 'almost'."

Shirk stared down the dark corridor. "Well, I guess we gotta go look, huh?"

They locked arms, and kicking up their heels, they began skipping through the tunnel. "We're off the see the creature, the ugly creature of--Decembus IXVI."

After one minute, seventeen seconds, Shirk was ready to give up. "I don't see any sign of the creature."

"There's one," Mock pointed a shaky finger and read, "'Creature--1/2

kilometer ahead. Take Johnson Street Exit'."

He turned and dropping to his knees, he began creeping back down the corridor.

Shirk grabbed a leg. "And just where do you think you're going?" "I..uh..just remembered I left the water running in my bathroom." "Forget it."

"But the Exitprise will d-wown!"

"Look, Mock, a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do."

"I ain't no man."

"No, you're a coward."

"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but that creature could kill me!"
"You got a point there." Shirk stared at the protrusion for a moment. "I
think I'll join you." He dropped to his knees.

Shirk heard a noise on his other side and looked in that direction. "Mock, my dear, sweet friend," he plucked at the Vulcan's shirttail, "I know Vulcans aren't suppose to lie, but do you think you could tell just a little bitty one for the ol' Cap'n?"

"How come I'm only your 'dear, sweet friend' when you want me to lie for

you?"

"Aw, come on, Mock--please?"

"Okay, what kind of lie do you want?"

"Just tell me that you stuck your face in a meat grinder recently."

"Now, why would I say a thing like that?"
"Because if you don't--we got company!"

Shirk tried to jump to his feet, but got them tangled with Mock's.

"Okay, which ones are yours?"

"Don't rush me! I'm trying to arrive at a logical conclusion."

"Mock, we could get killed here! Make up your mind!"

"Okay, okay." The last officer made his choice. Shirk grabbed his and took off. "Mock, run like hell!"

"You got it, man!" yelled a voice in front of him.

Shirk suddenly found he could do the 100-yard dash in three seconds. "What do you think you're doing?" he yelled as he chugged past the Vulcan. "Fools go where angels fear to tread, so get back there, you fool, and kill that thing!"

"Captain, I have been taught since childhood not to commit violence against another living being, especially when that being could do violence to me first.

I may be dumb, but I ain't stupid."

They came to a fork in the road, or in this case, a division of the tunnel. "Well," Shirk sighed, "I suppose one of these is the Johnson Street exit."

"'Pears logical."

"Okay, I'll flip you for it. Heads, you take the left tunnel; tails I take the right one."

"Agreed."

Shirk flipped him and the last officer landed on his skinny posterior. "Tails! That means you take both tunnels and I stay right here."

"Somehow that doesn't seem fair."

"Well, if you're going to be nitpicky about it! Personally, I think ${\cal I}$ should return to the Exitprise. Either one of us, by himself, is expendable.

Both of us are not. So I rule that you're expendable."

"Hey, now wait a minute here," Mock retorted, "I can do just as lousy a job of captaining the Exitprise as you. Besides, with 5,354 men, give or take a couple hundred who have probably kicked the bucket, the odds of both of us getting killed are...they are...wait a minute." He whipped out his semi-automatic calculator.

Shirk bent close. "You sure carry a lot of things in that non-existent

pocket of yours," he commented with admiration.

Mock grinned, "Fascinating, isn't it?" He began punching numbers. "2 + 2 = 5. Naw, that's not right. 597 + 1 = 723...Guess again. Okay, the odds of both of us biting the dust are somewhere between 2 to 1 and 6,813 to 8,278. Satisfied?"

"Yeah," Shirk took his finger and pushed up an eyebrow. "I'm satisfied

that if I'm gonna die, you're going first."

"Your generosity chokes me up." Mock went into fits of coughing. "Choose your tunnel, O wise and semi-ordinary captain."

Shirk made his choice, then launched into a chorus of "You take the right one

and I'll take the left one, and you'll find the creature afore me..."

It didn't take long for Shirk's hopes to be dashed, along with the ceiling and part of the wall. Meatgrinder Face a/k/a the Creature forced its bulk into the cavern.

"Oh, Lordy!" Shirk tried to shrink to an inch tall, "I'm too gorgeous to die!" He stared the thing in the face(?) and began singing, "Why me Lord, what have I ever done..."

Mock heard the sound of rocks falling, partially obscured by his captain's screams.

He whipped out his talkie-walkie. "Captain! Are you all right?"

Silence.

"Him! Answer me! Are you all right?" Mock was climbing the walls. When that didn't work, he decided to press on to where the tunnels converged. "Him! Are you dead?"

"Yes," came a squeaky voice over the talkie-walkie.

Mock stopped in his tracks and glanced around fearfully. "Oh my God! I'm being haunted by his ghost! I'm sorry, Spirit of Him Past, I was just goofing off with that girl on Denebia. I didn't really tell lies about you--I exaggerated."

"You did what!" thundered the talkie-walkie, "Wait'll I get my hands on you..."
"You can't hurt me," Mock smirked, "You're dead."
"I am not!"
"You lied!"

"You lied!"

"I exaggerated."
"Oh-oh. Uh, Him, about that girl..."

"We'll talk about her later. Right now, you get your tail over here and save me."

"Is that creature with you?"

"You bet it is."

"Sorry, but three's a crowd."

"Mock, I never thought I'd see you turn into a coward."

"Close your eyes."

"Uh, Mock, my dear Vulcan friend..."

"Oh no, here we go again."

"Remember that 70 credits I owe you from our last chess game?"

"What about it?"

"If I die, you'll never see a red credit of it. You know how it is-attorney's fees, universal estate tax..."

"All right, all right. I'm coming."

27 hours later, Shirk yelled, "It's about time you got here, Mock!"

"I got lost." His eyes fell on the creature. "Oh yech! It's horrible, it's terrible, it's..."

"Probably bored to death, just like me."

"Well, what do you want me to do?" Mock shot back, "A song and dance number?"

The creature moved closer and Mock began singing, "Da-da-da, da-da-da,

da-da-da-da-da." (That's "Jingle Bells" in Vulcan.)

The thing reared up on its hind whatevers, and made a sound which classified it as a non-music lover. Shirk clapped his hand over the last officer's mouth. "Cut that out! You're getting under its skin."

"Mmmm, mm, mmm!" Mock was shaking his head vigorously.

"That's just a saying. I don't mean to hurt your feelings, Mock, but I didn't think it appreciates your music..."

"Mmm, mmm!!"

"...not that I'm saying it's bad, mind you." The last officer was squirming. "Mock, what is your problem?" He watched the Vulcan turn greener and saw his eyes begin to glaze. "Aw, come on, Mock, don't take it so hard. Everyone tries to be a music critic."

"Mmmm . . . "

Shirk suddenly spotted his hand clasped over the Vulcan's mouth and nose. "Oops," he grinned sheepishly, "I forgot."

Mock dropped to his knees and gasped, "Who needs a deadly creature around

when I've got Him!"

The creature moved and steam began rising from beneath it.

"Look, Mock, it's burning something into the rock."

"Probably preparing roasted cockroaches or maybe it's cooking its own goose."

"No, it's words!"

"Roasted words? Well, I hope they're one-syllable. Got to keep the old skinny figure, you know." Bending over the burning letters, he read, "'You are both nuts!'" Mock pointed a shaking finger, his face livid with rage. "I've had it up to here with that thing!" He climbed a rock and drew a line on the ceiling. "Captain, I demand you make it eat those words!"

"You hard him!" Shirk pointed his razor at the creature.

It quickly covered the words, and when it moved again, they were gone. A

loud belch echoed through the cavern.

"Oh, gross!" Shirk shuddered, "What are we going to do with him?"

"Who, Him?"
"Him, him."

"Him, why are you talking to yourself?"
"I'm not; I'm talking to you about him."

Mock's eyes narrowed. "Is this one of those funny psychology tests that McAnnoy likes to give?"

Shirk was jumping up and down, screaming, "Him! Him! I'm talking about the

creature!"

"Well," Mock was miffed, "One might have said so in the first place."

Shirk tried to look thoughtful. I see only one way out of this. You're going to have to mindmeld with it, Mock."

"Me mindmeld with that lump of ick? What if it doesn't even have a mind?"

"Then you'll be a matched pair. Now, get with it! That's an order!"

Mock stuck a ramrod down his back. "Captain, there are some things which transcend even the discipline of the Service."

"My Vulcan friend, we have been together for a long time. Would I

deliberately steer you into danger?"

"Yes."

"Well, let's put it another way. If you don't follow my order, I'll string you up by those ears and use you for a dartboard!"

Mock stomped the ground angrily, "That does it: Here, Icky, Icky, Icky."

He reached out slowly, slender fingers almost making contact. They drew

back, then moved forward again.

"Come on, Mock."

"I'm willing, but my fingers ain't."

"Then bring 'em over here, and I'll persuade them." Shirk cracked his

knuckles significantly.

Mock ran for the creature and hugged it. "Mock to Thing. Mock to Thing. Are you there, Thing?" The creature moved closer. Suddenly a scream ripped the air.

"The pain! The pain!"

Shirk grabbed him. "Mock! What is it?"
"The damned thing's on my foot! The pain!"

Shirk put his shoulder to the creature and pushed. "Now, is that better?"

"Ohhh, it broke my toe!"

"Mock, you're *supposed* to be able to control pain."
"I'm dying here, and you're talking about control?"

"Get back there and mindmeld with that thing!"

Mock wandered off muttering. Shirk's non-sensitive ears missed such compliments as "Denebian slime-devil" and "Arcturian fumblebutt".

The last officer made contact again and began to look sicker than usual.

Clasping a hand over his mouth, he ran to a corner of the cave.

"Now, what's wrong?" Shirk demanded.

"We should never have made it eat those words," Mock groaned, "It's got indi--gestion."

Shirk whipped out his talkie-walkie. "McAnnoy, get down here! We've got a patient for you."

"I'all don't make cave calls," came the lazy reply.

"McAnnoy, we found the creature and it's sick. Now, get your tail down here!" "I'all is a doctor, not a pizza maker."

"McAnnoy," Shirk coaxed, "Mock's sick, too."

"You mean I'all get to administer to him, Him? Oh boy! Oh boy! Be right there!"

Mock promptly turned his back and got sicker.

McAnnoy was there in seconds with an extra set of beads and rattles. He shook them over the last officer, did a voodoo dance, and proclaimed his diagnosis. "Muck ain't got nothing but a terminal case of the Uglies."

"That's Mock!" the last officer screamed, "Mock! Mock!"

"You sound like a chicken with a sinus problem."

The Vulcan tried for Tel-Shaya as the good doctor ran behind Shirk and shook his fist in the air. "McAnnoy annoys again!"

Shirk sat on Mock while McAnnoy treated the creature. "Did you get anything from your contact with that thing?"

"Yes," the last officer grunted.

"What?"

"Get off my head and I'll tell you."

Shirk moved.

"It calls itself a 'Sorta'."

"A 'Sorta' what?"

"Oh, a sorta this and a sorta that."

"What's it want?"

"Laughter."

"Laughter?" Shirk pushed up both eyebrows. "Well, it's got a funny way of

going about it."

"I'm glad you agree." Mock moved up beside Him, standing on the leg which made him taller than Shirk. "You see, hundreds of years ago the Sorta was a stand-up comedian, a very good one. If it's audience didn't laugh at the jokes, it reached out and slapped them silly. Worked every time."

"What happened?"

"Something called 'Cable TV' came along and killed its career. The poor Sorta could no longer...reach out, reach out and slap someone."

Tears filled Shirk's eyes. "How tragic!"

"That's not all, Him. See all those big bronze balls? They are eggs."

"Eggs?"

"Yeah. People all over the galaxy used to throw them at the Sorta. When VanIceberg and his men started using them for basketballs, they were stealing the Sorta's memories!"

Shirk sighed, "And we think we've got problems."

McAnnoy ran up grinning from ear to ear and from forehead to chin. "I'all cured it! By golly, I'm beginning to think I'all could cure athlete's feet on a centipede."

"What'd you do?"

"I'all just gave it a couple hundred Rolaids. Now it knows how to spell 'relief'."

"Mock, get back in contact with the Sorta and tell it this cave is its home forever. VanIceberg and his men aren't all that bright, anyway, so a little silliness might be an improvement."

The last officer made contact again and began laughing hysterically. Shirk

grabbed him by his shirtail and yelled, "Did it slap you silly, Mock?"

"No, no," the Vulcan was still giggling, "it told the funniest joke. You see, there was this..." He looked up and saw McAnnoy listening intently. Mock turned Shirk around and began whispering. The good doctor bounded up and down behind Shirk, trying to read the last officer's lips.

"...an Orion slave girl...and she...then he...they did it in..."

He and Shirk fell all over each other laughing.

McAnnoy was annoyed. "I'all got better things to do than watch the two of you make fools of yourselves. I'all got a little ol' girl waitin' in Sickbay, so I'alls gonna return to the Exitprise and make a fool of myself."

"Well, Mock, I guess we might as well return to the Exitprise, too. I think we've done just about all the damage we can do down here."

"Agreed, O brave and semi-paunchy Captain."

They all gathered on the bridge for their usual after-dull-adventure lies. McAnnoy launched into his imitation of the Sorta, accompanied by loud belches. Sue You fainted over the navigation console and Chuk-Up upchucked.

Shirk and Mock blended in unison, "Oh, gross!"

The captain grinned, "Mr. Mock, you're thinking more like me every day." Mock grabbed his Vulcan mask off the science console and slapped it on.

"Ouch! I see no reason to stand here and be insulted." He sat on the floor.

"Mock," Shirk was staring over his head, "who are those two females standing over there?"

The last officer followed his gaze and ran into the people in question. "Pardon me, but who are you two females standing over there?"

"I am Rowena."

"And I am Ellen. We are with the Universal Enquirer."

Cries ran out across the bridge. "Oh no!" "Oh, gross!" "Oh damn it, I stumped my toe again!"

Shirk stared at the females and shivered. "What are you writing in that

little black book?"

"We are going to report this entire story to the public under the tentative title of... "There was a drum roll in the background... "The Cowards in the Day-

"Hey," Shirk yelled plaintively, "nobody's supposed to know that but us! Mock, grab that little black book. If they print that, we'll be ostracized,

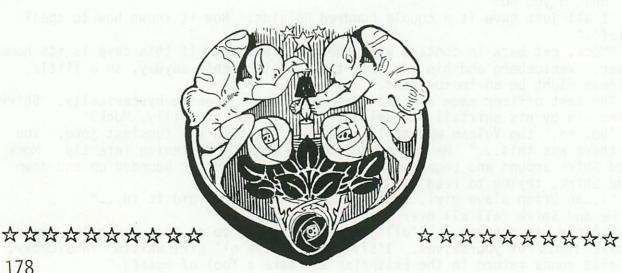
dehumanized..."

"Pasteurized, homogenized..." Mock made a leap--right on top of the science console. The two females ran into the turbo-lift and Shirk watched them wave bye-bye.

He sighed, "El Klutzo strikes again! You know, Mock, with any luck at all, you won't be back for STIII." He stomped over to his errant last officer. "I swear, I don't know why I put up with you."

Mock laid his head on his captain's shoulder and looked up with big, brown, soulful eyes. "Because you love me?"

**



 \Diamond なななななな

please, spock

In the interest of Scientific observation, Dr. McCoy, I could be persuaded To experiment with the Local means of transportation. However, the assurance that The dynamics of this Transportation is as safe As a baby's cradle escapes me. Your ardor for my participation Tends to engender some apprehension.

"Spock--Just get on the horse."

-- Patt Demetri

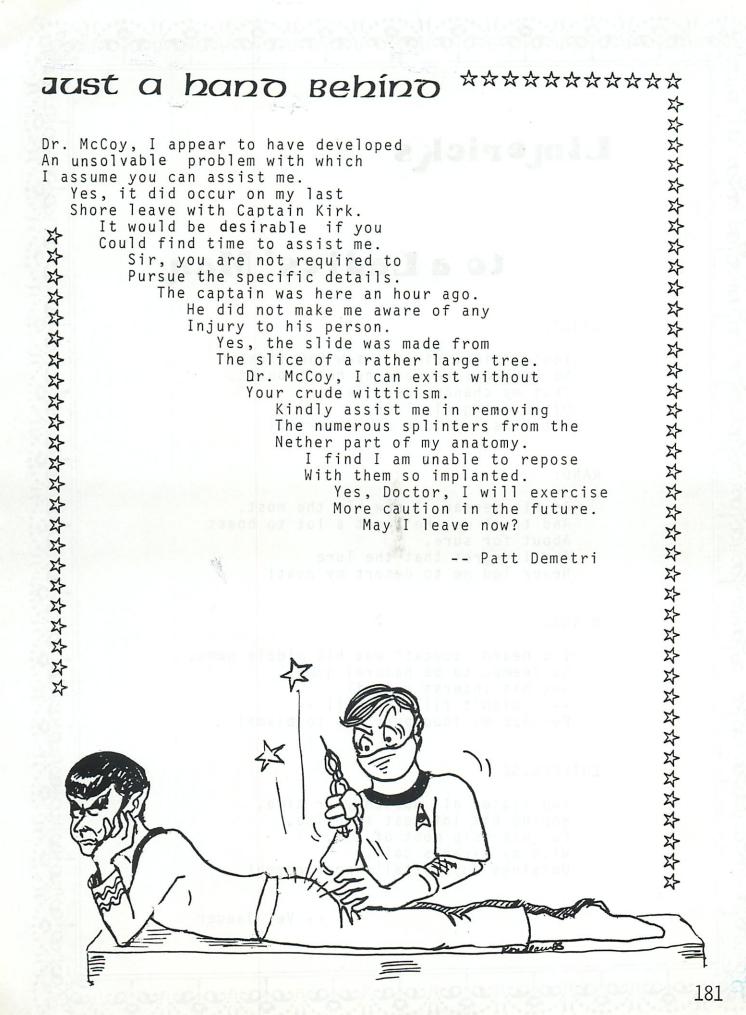


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ななななななななななななななななななななななななななななななななな

again ***********

ななななななな Walking through darkness on A beach full of rock Is not logical To do, Mr. Spock. I know that your eyes Can see in the dark, But a beach full of rocks Is not my kind of lark. So let us sit here and I'll tell a short tale Of our last shore leave And McCoy's night in jail. You know he was drinking Mint juleps with Scott. After several wet hours He'd had quite a lot. When they got up to leave They made a quick bet, About the heighth of the flagpole And how it would set. ななななななななななななななななななななな McCoy shinnied up high And perched on the ball; Mr. Scott was concerned ななななななななななななななななな About whether he'd fall. Scott called the guard To get him back down, But McCoy was laughing And acting the clown. When they finally pursuaded Him to slide down the pole, They collared him and threw him Straight into gaol. Now that you've heard What happened to him, Don't expect me to follow Your request -- c'mon, Jim! I'm staying right here, Perched on my rock. You can't get me down, Not tonight, Mr. Spock. -- Patt Demetri



Limericks

to a Ladies' Man

UHURA:

You'd think, since I saw him first, So gorgeous he made my heart burst, That my chances were fair Of entering his lair, But alas, my luck was accursed!

RAND:

As his yeoman, I saw him the most, And trust me, he's got a lot to boast About for sure, And I regret that the lure Never led me to desert my post!

M'RESS:

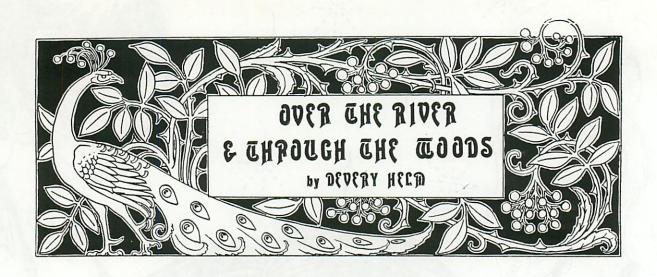
I'd heard "tomcat" was his middle name,
So seemed to be natural game,
But his interst was nil
-- I didn't fill the bill -Perhaps my loud purr was to blame!

ENTERPRISE:

You ladies all wasted your time, Hoping his interest to prime, For his ship most of all, With my siren's call, Outsings any mortal's poor rhyme!

-- Vel Jaeger





"Admiral," Kirk was saying to the man seated beside him at the head of the table, "I want to thank you for having us here to share

Thanksgiving Dinner with you and your family."

"The pleasure is ours, Captain," Admiral Wormhole replied. realize that your ship has just returned from a five year mission out in deep space, and I thought it would be a good opportunity for some

of your crew to relax and readjust to Earth living again."

"Yes, it has been a grueling, five years," Kirk agreed. "Fighting unknown dangers... contacting alien beings... just basically going where no man has gone before--" He stopped abruptly as on his other side Spock had begun humming a pre-Reform Vulcan fight song similar to "On, Milwaukee." "Ahem..uh...yes," Kirk continued, turning back to Admiral Wormhole, "we are home now, and it is certainly a pleasure to reestablish ourselves in this wonderful example of our heritage."

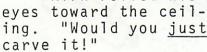
Of the nine crew members present, six of them--Scott, Reilly, Chekov, Uhura, Sulu, and Spock--looked at each other and shrugged.

Just then the turkey was brought in, golden brown and piping hot from the food processor. Admiral Wormhole turned to Kirk and, with a chuckle suggested, "Perhaps since we have a skilled surgeon with us...?"

"Of course, Kirk replied. "Bones, would you care to do the honors?"

McCoy was up in a flash, going over the turkey with his med scanner. "It's dead, Jim," the doctor intoned solemnly. "It appears to be intense heat prostration, but I should do a biopsy-"

Kirk rolled his eyes toward the ceil-"Would you just





"Oh!" McCoy exclaimed. "Sure. Nurse Chapel can assist," and he held out his hand, palm up. "Scalpel."

"Hey, I thought I was getting the day off!" Chapel complained.

"And now you want me to assist at a turkey carving...?"

"No problem," Sulu cried, jumping up and unsheathing his sword. "I'll do it! En garde!" He leapt up on the table and began hacking his roasted adversary to ribbons.

"Watch the--" SPLAT "--sweet potatoes," Kirk cautioned a little too late. "Oh well," he shrugged under his breath to Spock, "I never

did care for those things anyway."

Chekov's voice broke in over the commotion. "Did you know that Thanksgiving was actually inwented by a Russian?" This information was greeted by a dollop of sweet potato on Chekov's ear which Sulu

flung as he cleaned off his boot.

"Mr. Sulu--Mr. Chekov-- that'll be enough!" Kirk ordered. is supposed to be a formal gathering for a time honored celebration. I'd like it to be shown the respect it deserves, is that clear! He looked around, satisfied that things were once more under control, and his eyes fell on the platter now heaped with carved turkey. "First dibbs on the drumstick!" he shouted.

"I get the other one!" McCoy yelled, grabbing a greasy leg and

clutching it to his chest.

"I vant the breast," announced Chekov with a leer.

"Chauvinist," murmured Uhura as she passed him the platter.
"Somehow," Chapel sighed wistfully, "turkey just doesn't taste

the same when it's not made out of meatloaf."

"Captain," Spock whispered to Kirk. "Yes, Spock?" Kirk whispered back.

"What is this curious red substance?"

"Cranberry sauce," Kirk explained patiently.
"I do not believe that I will care for it.

"Spock," Kirk began through gritted teeth. "I already told you back on the ship that you didn't have to eat the turkey. But you do have to take a spoonful of everything else and at least try it. I'm sure there must be something--"

"Is there a problem, Captain?" Admiral Wormhole inquired.

"Uh...no, no problem really. My first officer is a vegetarian... and a very picky one, I might add," he emphasized, glaring back at

"Oh dear," Mrs. Wormhole fretted. "I should have realized. I... uh...do have a can of Campbell's cream of plomik soup that I could

open...?" she offered.

"Please don't worry about it, Mrs. Wormhole," Kirk assured her. "Spock will be fine." And he plopped a helping of mashed potatoes onto the Vulcan's plate. Spock looked up at him, imploring. "Oh, all right," Kirk said with an exasperated sigh, and made an indention in the mound with the back of his spoon, then watched as Spock filled it with gravy. IF HE WEREN'T THE BEST FIRST OFFICER IN STARFLEET... Kirk thought, shaking his head.

"HOW LONG WILL YOU BE ON EARTH, CAPTAIN?" Mrs. Wormhole shouted over the melodious wail of Scotty's bagpipes as the Chief Engineer attempted to play an old Aberdeen Thanksgiving tune. Uhura and Kevin

Riley started snapping their fingers along with the beat.

"TWO WEEKS," Kirk yelled back. "WE JUST HAVE TO ROTATE THE DI-LITHIUM CRYSTALS AND... recharge the phaser banks." In mid sentence, Spock had grabbed the bagpipes and given a dazzling exhibition of Tal Shaya. Everyone except Scott applauded.

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"The bagpipes were definitely not inwented by a Russian," Chekov piped in, taking his fingers out of his ears. (He had clapped with his elbows.)

"Come, come, now," Kirk chided and raised his wine glass. He paused only momentarily as he noticed an extra helping of a curious red substance on his plate. to give Spock a dirty look. "Ahem...I proposed a toast," he began.

"Hold it!" hollered "Look at the McCoy. time--it's almost 1500 hours--the Super Nova Bowl Game is on!"

"By George, it is!"

Admiral Wormhole declared. "We certainly can't miss that -- the Alpha Centurian Asteroids against the Plutonian Phasers! Should be quite a game! Let's go into the den."

"The Asteroids'll knock 'em apart," assured McCoy.

"Hah!" hahed Sulu. "I'll bet you twenty-five credits that the Phasers will disintegrate your Asteroids!" And so they argued all the way out of the room. Even Spock, after surreptitiously grabbing some celery, stalked out also.

"Well," Uhura said after a few contemplative minutes on the departure of the entire male contingent, "That's <u>one</u> thing we don't have to worry about..." she looked solemnly upwards, "...out there."

"What's that?" Chapel asked distractedly. She was studying with

professional interest the remains of Scotty's bagpipes, and making a mental note never to sing off key in front of Spock.

"The great Thanksgiving Daydessert...and I'm not talking about

the pumpkin pie!"

"Did someone mention...dessert?" Kirk asked hopefully, sticking his head through the doorway. It was jerked back again by his friendly neighborhood physician who propelled Kirk back to the den with the admonishment, "You're supposed to be on a diet!" and ignoring Kirk's protests of "But it's really for Spock!"

Mrs. Wormhole automatically got up and brought a large trayful of dessertsout to the gathering throng. When she returned, hair askance and wide eyed, it looked as if she had just been through a skirmish

with the Klingons.

"Something wrong?" Chapel asked, swearing that she was going to

ask for overtime if the problem was medical.

"My," Mrs. Wormhole exclaimed. "Such exhuberance over pumpkin pie! There was only one piece left, and everyone fighting and screaming overwho would get it...."

"Oh dear. I hope the captain straightened everything out,"

"Actually, he was the one who started it," Mrs. Wormhole replied.

"But it's all right now. He just kept yelling "sic 'em, Spock', and the commander neck pinched the others out of the way."

"The pumpkin pie on the Enterprise tastes a lot like meatloaf," Chapel offered by way of an explanation.

"Well, I'd better take some more snacks in," Mrs. Wormhole said. I really didn't like the way Mr. Spock kept eyeing my potted fern.. and the captain did mention that Vulcans were vegetarians." The admiral's wife, laden with chips and crackers, ambled back into the com-

"You know something," Uhura sighed. "There's really <u>no</u> place like home for the holidays."

bat zone.

"That's for sure," Chapel agreed, whipping out her communicator. "Let's beam back to the ship before we get stuck doing the dishes."

Just before the transporter beam caught them, they could hear Sulu cheering for the Phasers, McCoy for the Asteroids, and Kirk yelling loudest of all, "Hooray for the pumpkin pie!"



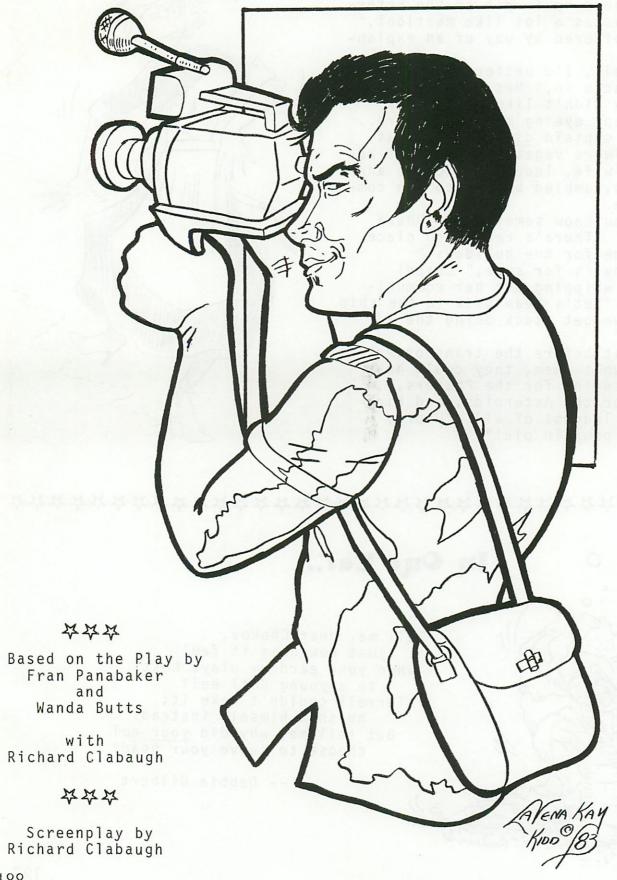
In One Ear...



Tell me, dear Chekov,
just how does it feel
When your eardrum plays host
to a young Ceti eel?
Terrell couldn't take it;
he shot himself instead.
But tell me, why did your eel
choose to leave your head?

-- Debbie Gilbert

STAR TREK: THE HOME MOVIE



FADE IN:

TITLES: WHITE LETTERS AGAINST BLACK BACKGROUND

The credits appear to grand and sweeping music as follows:

TITLES

The UNITED FANS OF PINELLAS presents

STAR TREK: THE HOME MOVIE

NOT STARRING WILLIAM SHATNER, LEONARD NIMOY, or DEFOREST KELLEY.

ALSO NOT STARRING NICHELLE NICHOLS, JAMES DOOHAN, GEORGE TAKEI, MAJEL BAR-RETT, GRACE LEE WHITNEY, or WALTER KOENIG.

AND NOT INTRODUCING PERSIS KHAMBATTA as Ilia, or STEPHEN COLLINS as Decker.

(Our real credits will go at the end of the film)

DISSOLVE TO:

CLOUD IN SPACE:

A number of KLINGON SHIPS are approaching. camera does its little twist as it follows them in. Center on one ship.

CUT TO:

THE BRIDGE OF THE KLINGON SHIP IN THE LEAD

The room is bustling with activity as many pieces of sophisticated equipment perform their functions and KLINGONS rush about performing their duties as well. We focus in on the COM-MANDER sitting in the midst of all this. Beside him stands someone who is ignored by everyone, wearing a black cloak with TRANSLATOR written Behind the in white letters across the front. Commander with his back to us is another KLINGON working some strange controls.

COMMANDER

Free-ja!

TRANSLATOR

Tactical

COMMANDER

Dos-ta!

TRANSLATOR

Visual

COMMANDER

Whaz-zat!?

TRANSLATOR

What is that?

The Klingon behind the Commander suddenly turns from his console towards his superior. For the first time we see he is munching on a McDonald's For the STAR TREK Happy Meal. He is also oblivious to the Translator.

> KLINGON Klaatu Barata Nikto.

TRANSLATOR Who cares? It breathes in Klingon space.

COMMANDER E pleq - neestah!

TRANSLATOR

Kill it!

COMMANDER (lifts a finger sharply)

TRANSLATOR (also lifts finger) Ready!

COMMANDER (points suddenly forward) Machtl

TRANSLATOR (also pointing forward)

The ship rocks briefly and the lights dim slightly as the torpedo is fired.

CUT TO:

EXT. - THE KLINGON SHIP

As a glowing bolt of energy fires from the forward torpedo tube; we watch as the bolt of energy goes hurtling off toward the cloud with little "starry-like" rotations along the way.

It penetrates the cloud and there is a moment of quiet.

THE KLINGON BRIDGE - COMMANDER

Looks over at his aid with uncertainty, then back at the screen.



THE CLOUD

Suddenly the small "starry" bolt they fired into the cloud comes out, screaming like a yelping dog, and is instantly followed by a much larger, non-"starry" bolt of energy chasing after it.

THE KLINGON BRIDGE

Both Klingons remain stunned as they watch the screen.

EXT. - KLINGON SHIPS

As their own "starry" bolt of energy heads towards them, still followed by its much larger attacker. Both smash into the ship/ships and begin to vaporize them.

THE KLINGON BRIDGE

All fall out of their seats, the Commander screaming something unintelligible as the Translator hangs on for a moment before abruptly exiting from this chaotic scene.

EXT. - THE KLINGON SHIPS

As they vanish from the stars. We hold on this for a beat, then, there is a faint sound of someone as we....

CUT TO:

EXT - THE PLANET VULCAN - DAY

It is very bright and very red as we gaze down at SPOCK, sitting in the full Lotus position in the sand. At first his face is lowered, then he slowly looks up at us, his hands clenched as if praying. He stops his "Ommming" as he looks up.



WIDE SHOT - MATTE PAINTING

Spock is at the base of the steps at the top of which stand the VULCAN MASTERS. Spock rises and starts walking towards them.

CLOSER SHOT

Spock steps before the Vulcan masters and bends down onto one knee. Standing with the Vulcan Masters is the TRANSLATOR, from the previous scene. They, like the Klingons, seem totally unaware of the Translator's presence.

MASTER #1 Spochk. Es queeshly ahs ou caine, snahtch des madanion frohm mei hans.

TRANSLATOR
Spock, as quickly as you can, snatch
this medallion from my hand.

Spock thinks for a moment, then makes a stab at it. He fails.

MASTER #1 Du haf Bozo de Klinaur, Spochk.

TRANSLATOR You blew it, Spock.

The masters walk off, dropping the medallion on the ground as the leave. Spock bends over and picks it up. Holding it in his hands, he mouths the words, "Son of a--", apruptly,

CUT TO

THE SKYWAY BRIDGE AS A SPACESHIP ZOOMS PAST IT:

CUT TO:

THE "SHUTTLE" ARRIVING AT TAMPA INTERNATIONAL

ADMIRAL KIRK steps off a shuttle carrying his suitcase with him and looks around. As he makes his way across the Terminal we see many ASSORTED ALIENS in the background. Suddenly, he spots a familiar face in the crowd.

KIRK (calling out) Commander Stoick!

We see a very draggish looking Vulcan in heavy eye makeup. When he talks he also displays some very feminine mannerisms. This is, of course, COMMANDER STOICK. He turns to talk to Kirk.

> STOICK Admiral Kirk.

KIRK Have you received your assignment as Enterprise Science Officer yet?

STOICK Uw, yes, Admiral. Based I'm told on your recommendations.

KIRK
(seriously)
I've changed the schedule slightly.
The Enterprise will be leaving in
twelve hours. I expect you to report
to me aboard her then.

STOICK (seductively) To YOU, Admiral?

KIRK It is my intention to be aboard that ship when she leaves. Report to me then.

Kirk turns and exits the scene as a disgruntled Stoick places his hands on his hips in a "humph" manner, then leaves.

CUT TO:

EXT - THE ENTERPRISE IN DRY DOCK

INT - THE ENGINE ROOM

DECKER is messing with one of the consoles as Kirk enters the room.

KIRK (yelling to off-screen) Thanks, Scotty.

DECKER
(to an assistant beside him)
Ah, ha. I knew it. Here's the problem.
Faulty modules.

As he says this he suddenly rips the interior wiring out of the console he's working on, which is labeled TRANSPORTER CIRCUITS, and hands them to his very shocked assistant. At this point Kirk steps up to him.

KIRK Mr. Decker, can I have a word with you?

DECKER

Sure.

He and Kirk cross over to a corner of the room

DECKER
I hope this isn't some kind of Starfleet pep talk. I'm really too busy right now to...

KIRK (interrupting) I'm taking over the center seat, Will.

DECKER You're what?

KIRK
I'm replacing you as Captain of the Enterprise.

DECKER

You are?

KIRK You'll remain on as executive officer. A temporary grade reduction to Commander.

DECKER
You personally are assuming command?

KIRK (pleased with himself)
Yeah. Yeah.

DECKER May I ask why?

KIRK
My experience. Five years dealing with
unknowns like this. My familiarity
with the Enterprise, its crew.

DECKER
This is an almost totally new Enterprise, you don't know her a tenth as well as I do and you're taking command?

KIRK (stepping forward)
Look at me, Will. Read my lips. I - am - the - Captain.

DECKER (thinks for a beat then) Now let me get this straight. You, not me, are going to be the Captain?

KIRK Let me make this simple. Report to your station. COMMANDER!

Decker looks really pissed off and exits. Kirk stands there for a moment when suddenly SPARKS FLY out of the panel which Decker was working on. We hear a sudden voiceover...

VOICE OVER
Malfunction. Malfunction.

Kirk's face registers the situation and he starts off for the transporter room.

CUT TO:

THE TRANSPORTER ROOM

Sparks fly as transporter CHIEF RAND tries desperately to manage the controls. $\protect\end{\protect}$

RAND
Do you read me, Starfleet? Override us. Pull them back!

Suddenly Kirk snaps into the room, evaluates the situation and abruptly knocks Rand aside to assume the controls.

KIRK Give it to me, Starfleet, we're loosing them. Boost your matter gain, we need more signal!

RAND Oh, no, they're forming.

The transporter chamber flares and two forms begin to materialize in a chaotic and distorted manner. They look really weird, to say the least. At one point they have distorted to look almost like Bozo or Mickey Mouse (now that's what I call a malfunction). Special effects fade them in and out and finally, in a scream of agony, the disfigured creatures in the chamber vanish. For a moment there is only silence. Then

KIRK

(casually, as if unimportant)

(suddenly realizing the importance)

Starfleet? Do you have them?

VOICE OVER (filtered)

No, we don't have 'em! I thought you

(another voice mumbles in the background and then...) What? Oh, is that what that was? Ah, affirmative on that last question, Enterprise. They didn't make it.

Kirk clicks off the intercom.

RAND (seriously) They're dead, Jim.

He pats Rand on the shoulder but says nothing. As Kirk goes to exit, the doors open and several technicians go running in. He stops one of them and then leans over and whispers something to him, motioning towards Rand in the process. The technician nods and then Kirk leaves.

CUT TO:

THE ENTERPRISE CORRIDORS

Kirk comes out of the transporter room and starts down one of the corridors. After a few moments it becomes painfully obvious that he is lost. He stops in front of a door hesitais lost. He stops in front of a door hesitatingly, then stops a passing CREW PERSON to ask a question.

(Motioning to door) Turbo shaft eight?

CREW PERSON No, Urinal Seven. Turbo shaft eight is back that way, sir.

The person points in the direction from which he had just come. Kirk starts off in that direction and stops when he notices Decker standing at the corridor intersection, waiting for him. Decker, obviously, can barely contain his laughter at what has just happened. After a moment Kirk composes himself and walks up to Decker.

> KIRK We'll have to replace Commander Stoick. I'd still like a Vulcan there if possible. Decker suddenly steps forward.

DECKER None available. In fact, there's no one who's fully rated on these new designs.

(sizes up Decker) You are, Mister Decker. I'm afraid you'll just have to double as Science Officer. Who was that other person

DECKER Yeoman Parsons, sir. Head Pastry Chef.

KIRK (thoughtfully)
We'll need a new pastry chef. I'd
still like a woman there, if possible.

None available, sir. In fact, there's no one fully rated on these new galley designs.

KIRK

(same as before) You are, Mister Decker. I'm afraid you'll just have to double as pastry chef, too.

Kirk exits abruptly. Decker stands there for a moment, then exits muttering more temperamental obscenities.

CUT TO:

EXT - USS ENTERPRISE - TRANSITION SHOT: MUSIC

CUT TO:

INT - USS INTERPRISE - THE BRIDGE

Kirk is seated in his chair going over some literature in his hands. Around him the same familiar crew is present in their new positions.

> UHURA Transporter room reports fully repaired and operational.

Reply awaiting arrival of final crew replacements.

Transporter personnel report Navigator Lt. Ilia on board, sir. She's on her way to the bridge. She's Deltan.

Abruptly the turbolift doors slide open and ILIA, wearing a bald cap, exits the elevator and crosses to stand behind Kirk. He is so preoccupied with his literature that at first he doesn't even look up at her. When she speaks it is with a lisp.

ILIA Wotenant Iwia wepowting fow duty, tha.

(not looking up at first) Good. Welcome aboard, Lieu... (looks up and screams) OH, MY GOD, SHE'S BALD!!!

DECKER Hello, Ilia.

ILIA (smiling) Dweckea. (she frowns) Commanda?

(regaining his composure) Yes. Our Exec and Science officer. And pastry chef.

DECKER (to Ilia)
Captain Kirk has the utmost confidence in me.

UHURA

Captain?

Both Decker and Kirk turn to face her. Then Decker looks over at Kirk and Kirk gives Decker a dirty look.

UHURA
Dock crew reports our last crewman
to come aboard. He is reported wearing
some kind of disguise and is refusing
to step into the transporter beam.

Oh? I'll see about that.

Kirk steps into the turbolift.

KIRK Transporter room.

The door closes and a moment later we...

CUT TO:

THE TRANSPORTER ROOM

RAND is bound and gagged in the far corner to prevent further transporter calamities. Kirk stands by the controls as an unknown operator beams the person aboard, then exits. When he first materializes he has his back to us and we do not see him until he begins to speak.

KIRK (stepping forward) Well, you almost got away, Bones.

MCCOY suddenly turns toward camera and we see he is wearing a Groucho Marx disguise and immitates his mannerisms.



MCCOY
Ah, Admiral Kirk, so you're behind all
this.

Kirk steps up to him and extends a hand toward $\ensuremath{\mathsf{him}}$.

KIRK I need you, Bones. Damn it, I need you.

MCCOY Why, what's the matter? Didn't that hair transplant I gave you take?

Kirk reacts.

MCCOY Just kidding, Jimmy Boy. I mean, all you had to do was ask, right? Why not?

RAND strains to try to tell him something (ie, the danger).

KIRK You haven't been briefed yet, have you?

 $$\operatorname{\text{MCCOY}}$$ No. Why? Is there something I should know?

RAND is still making noises. It attracts $\mbox{McCoy's}$ attention.

MCCOY Well, then. Permission to come aboard? RAND tries to scream, "no!"

> KIRK (enthusiastically) Granted.

MCCOY (exitting) They've probably redesigned the whole sick bay. I know engineers; they love to change things. I even hear Chapel's got brown hair now.

CUT TO:

EXT: USS ENTERPRISE -- PREPARING TO LEAVE DRY DOCK

Various umbilicals are being disconnected and we can see some humorous goings on in the background as the ship is readied to go.

CUT TO:

INT: USS ENTERPRISE -- THE BRIDGE

Kirk is seated in his chair talking into the intercom system when we pick up the scene. $% \left(1\right) =\left\{ 1\right\} =\left\{$

KIRK Scotty, I'm going to need warp drive as soon as we leave drydock.

SCOTT
(over intercom)
Captain, we no canna do it. The matter/antimatter reactor chamber is all kuddled up in a massive intercolecular disruption field. It'll take at least another twelve hours before the hyperbolic thingamagig is rebalanced.

KIRK
(trying to hide the fact that
he doesn't understand a word
Scott has just said)
Well, keep working on it.

McCoy enters the bridge at this point. Kirk looks a little nervous. He gets up and begins to "push" his people as he talks to tham.

(to Uhura)
How's it going, Uhura? Is Communications ready?

(to Chekov) How about Weapons, Mister? Are they ready to go?

(to Decker)
How about Science Station, ready? How
about the ship? Huh? And how about
desert tonight, huh?

Kirk is getting violent and McCoy suddenly pulls him aside.

MCCOY Jim! You're pushing. Your people know their jobs.

Kirk looks thoughtful, then regretfully goes back to his chair.

KIRK
Prepare to leave dry dock. Mr. Sulu,
...Mr. Sulu!

SULU, seated at the helm, seems to be preoccupied with something he is writing.

> SULU Captain? Which do you like the sound of best, "Mirror Friend, Mirror Foe" or "Mirror Foe, Mirror Friend"?

KIRK (sigh) Take us out.

CUT TO:

INT -- USS ENTERPRISE -- LEAVING DRY DOCK

Through a series of shots we follow the Enterprise as it leaves dry dock and exits the solar system. These shots should somehow be humorous and contain elements that, although not "cheap", are nevertheless funny to see. Perhaps the Enterprise passes ships from "other" space shows such as STAR WARS, GAL-ACTICA, or SPACE:1999. Instead of flying past Jupiter, it could instead fly past a McDonald's in space (Gosh knows they're everywhere) or even something else. Over the final shots of the Enterprise we hear...

(voiceover)
Captain's Log: due to the time factor

involved, I must risk engaging the new warp engines, although as yet untested, while still within the confines of the solar system.

INT -- USS ENTERPRISE -- THE BRIDGE

Camera centers in on Kirk, who is seated in his chair.

KIRK (to intercom, again)
Mr. Scott, I'm going to need warp drive.

SCOTT I can't do it, sir, blah, blah, blah.

KIRK
I'm not interested in the technical
stuff, Scotty. That intruder is only
fifty hours away from Earth. I need
warp drive now!
 (slaps off intercom)
Mr. Sulu, ahead warp factor one.

SULU (pushing his throttle*)
Warp point six, sir, point seven,
point eight, point nine...
CUT TO:

EXT -- THE ENTERPRISE

Suddenly the familiar "WARP DRIVE" effect is done, ending with the same small "flash" as it breaks away and with a simultaneous "POP"! sound on the soundtrack.

INT -- THE BRIDGE

Picking up right where we left off.

SULU Warp one, sir!

KIRK (turning to Decker) Good. Mr. Decker--

Kirk is cut short by the claxon sounding. On the screen behind him we see the "wormhole" effect. He spins and looks at the screen. Everyone starts bouncing in their seats.

> KIRK WORMHOLE!

DECKER Twenty-two seconds before reversal takes effect.

ILIA Unidentified object pulled into the wormhole with us.

^{*} NOTE; Sulu's throttle looks and works like a stickshift for any standard four-gear car. He shifts it as he speaks.

KIRK

Viewer on.

All react at what they see on the screen.

ANGLE ON VIEWSCREEN

An asteroid is in the center, surrounded by concentric, spinning circles.

RESUME BRIDGE

ILIA Object is an asteroid, dead ahead,

KIRK

(voice distorted) Mr. Chekov, fire main phasers.

DECKER

(his voice also distorted) Nooooooooooooooooooo Belay that phaser order; arm photon torpedoes.

ILIA

Ten seconds to impact.

CHEKOV

Photon torpedoes armed.

ILIA

Eight seconds to impact.

DECKER

Fire torpedoes.

CHEKOV

Torpedoes awaaaaaaaaaaaaayyyyyyyyyyyyy.

CUT TO:

EXT -- USS ENTERPRISE

Special effects sequence in which the ship fires its torpedoes and destroys the asteroid \underline{and} comes out of the wormhole.

CUT TO:

THE BRIDGE

Everyone is slowing their bouncing as we are no longer in the wormhole.

KIRK:

Mr. Decker. I want a word with you in my quarters.

Kirk stands to exit.

MCCOY

Mind if I tag along?

All get into the turbolift.

CUT TO:

INT -- KIRK'S QUARTERS

They all march in as though it were a parade.

(suddenly, to Decker) Stop competing with me, Decker. \underline{I} wanted to order photon torpedoes \overline{b} ack

there, but nooooooooooo, you had to order photon torpedoes. Why?

DECKER

Sir, with the new design of the ship, phasers are inoperable without warp drive.

KIRK (slowly; faking it)
Oh. I knew that.

There is an intercom signal followed by Uhura's voice.

UHURA

(Voiceover) Captain. Signal from a long range Federation shuttle, sir. She wishes to come alongside.

Uhura appeas on a very "large" screen behind Kirk and I mean LARGE! Small "Kirk" dolls will be used agains a HUGE projected image of UHURA. Close-ups of Kirk giving his lines will be shot looking down at him.

(half yelling to be heard) For what purpose, Lieutenant?

The image on the screen suddenly changes to that of Chekov.

> CHEKOV My security scan shows it has a grade one priority, sir. Non-beligerencey confirmed. I suspect it is a courier of some kind.

Very well, Mr. Chekov, see to it. I'm on my way to the bridge.

CUT TO:

EXT -- USS ENTERPRISE

A shuttle is going through the procedure of docking with the Enterprise. This is done in several well-executed but terribly overdone steps. Finally attached, we...

CUT TO:

INT -- USS ENTERPRISE -- A CORRIDOR

Chekov stands by the entrance to the ship as the music swells. The doors open and MR. SPOCK steps on board.

> SPOCK Permission to come aboard?

(smiling) Granted, Mr. Spock, gran......

Spock suddenly turns and exits the scene without waiting for Chekov to finish his sentence. The MUSIC suddenly slows down and abruptly stops.

> CHEKOV (continuing)

.....ted.
(muttering to himself) (muttering to mimse..., No good Cossack sleezeball. CONTINUED



Chekov himself turns to exit the scene. As he does so he just slightly bumps his toe and lets out a howling scream similar to the one he will do on the bridge later.

CUT TO:

THE BRIDGE

Kirk is seated in his command chair again, reading his literature as the doors slide open and Spock, dressed in a long black robe, steps onto the bridge. Uhura is the first to see him and reacts (actually, over-reacts).

UHUR. G-A-S-P !!!

SULU
Why, it's Mister.....Mister.....

Kirk seems to be ignoring his cue, still engaged in his literature, and Sulu has to nudge him in order for him to finally look up and see Spock. He then picks up Sulu's line.

KIRK
(finally looking up)
Spock. Spock!
(throws himself at the Vulcan)
Spock, Spock, Spock, (etc)

UHURA (aside) Save it, please.

SPOCK
I have been monitoring your communications with Starfleet Command, Captain.
I have come to solve all your problems and save the day.

CUT TO: EXT -- USS ENTERPRISE -- MOYING THROUGH SPACE

KIRK (voiceover) Captain's Log: Stardate 7413.4.

INT -- ENGINE ROOM

Spock is standing by a console very similar to the one we saw Decker standing by earlier. As Kirk narrates we watch Spock.

> KIRK (voiceover continuing) Due to Mr. Spock's timely arrival...

Spock glances at his watch.

KIRK (continuing)
the engines are now properly rebalanced. We have reached warp drive
and are now...

THE BRIDGE

Kirk is seated in his command chair as he finishes the log we have just been listening to.

KIRK ...only seconds away from the mysterious cloud.

CHEKOV
There it is, Captain!

KIRK
All right! We're not going to do anything. We're not going to contact
Starfleet, we're not going to put up our screens, we're not going to release any sensor drones, we're not going to do anything to provoke an attack! We're not going to do ANYTHING......

Spock, sitting at the Science Station, suddenly sneezes.

SPOCK Achooo!

Alarms suddenly sound as the cloud begins to attack. All on board the bridge stare in shock for an instant. Suddenly they are hit. Chekov suddenly holds up his arm and screams in pain.

KIRK (reacting to Chekov) Decker, you fool!

Chekov screams again.

KIRK (continuing) Look what you'ye done!

Chekoy holds his arm for a moment, then slowly falls to the floor. McCoy instantly comes out of the turbolift, along with Dr. Chapel, and using his Medi-Salt Shaker, begins to sprinkle salt onto Chekoy's injured arm.

ILIA That was a twelfth power energy field!

DECKER
Twelfth power! Why, not even a thousand starships could....

All turn to gaze at Spock, who has gone into a trance.

DECKER

Mr. Spock?

KIRK (jumping up) Spock? Tell me!

SPOCK (comes out of it)
I sense...puzzlement? We have been contacted. Why have we not replied? We may proceed, Captain.

DECKER
Captain! To proceed now, in my opinion, would be unwarranted!

KIRK How do you define "unwarranted"?

DECKER
(suddenly producing a dictionary)
Unwarranted. Adjective. Not warranted;
not assured or certain; not guaranteed.





as to fulfillment, reliability, quality.
2. Not authorized or justified.

Kirk looks at Decker blankly for a moment.

DECKER (continuing after a beat) You asked my definition, sir.

KIRK
(ignoring Decker)
Mr. Sulu; normal light speed. Let's
penetrate that cloud.

The crew is all facing forwards, looking at the screen. Everyone is wide awake and ready for action.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT -- USS ENTERPRISE

Penetrating the cloud; slow music is playing.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT -- THE BRIDGE

Crew still looks sharp.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT -- THE BRIDGE -- NOT QUITE SO SHARP

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT -- THE ENTERPRISE -- STILL PENETRATING

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT -- USS ENTERPRISE -- THE BRIDGE

The entire bridge crew is almost asleep as the captain enters his latest log entry. The boring music continues. Decker, in an apron, is serving pastries. Spock is watching old TV shows on his monitor screens.

KIRK
Captain's Log: Supplemental. We have been penetrating the cloud for over-(yawns)
--twelve hours now. So far, nothing--

Suddenly, alarms go off and the bridge crew snaps into the ready position. $% \left\{ \left(1\right\} \right\} =\left\{ \left(1\right\} \right\} =\left\{ \left(1\right) \right\} =\left\{ \left(1$

ALARM
INTRUDER ALERT! INTRUDER ALERT!

Lights flash and suddenly there is a WHOOSHING sound and a PROBE appears on the bridge of the Enterprise. The PROBE is, in fact, merely a sparkler superimposed over the image. It has human arms superimposed on it and it sort of "feels" its way around the bridge, going first to Chekov's panel.

CHEKOV Mister Spock! Could this be one of their crew?

 $\begin{array}{c} \text{SPOCK} \\ \text{A probe from their vessel , Captain.} \end{array}$

Probe begins "feeling out" Chekov's panel.

DECKER Don't interfere with it!

CHEKOV No shit I will not interfere!

The probe moves on over to the science station.

KIRK
No one interfere with it. It doesn't seem to be interested in us. Only the ship.

The probe begins to "feel out" the science station. The panels light up and display various images on them.

KIRK (continuing) Computer off! It's reading our records! Earth's defenses, Starfleet strengths!

Spock suddenly steps forward and smashes his fist down onto the panel. Since it is only cardboard the panel smashes into tiny pieces. Suddenly the probe gets mad. It places it superimposed hands on its "hips" in indignation, then goes after Spock, chasing him across the bridge to the helm, hitting him all along the way. Ilia tries to stop it. Suddenly the probe stops, seems to look at Ilia, then grabs her. Decker steps forward as if he is going to do something but the probe extends an arm and slaps the pastries out of his hands and all over the floor. In another moment, the probe is gone, along with Ilia.

DECKER
(looking around)
Ilia!
(with even more anger)
MY PASTRIES!
(to Kirk)
This is how I define unwarranted!

KIRK (mockingly) This is how I define unwarranted.

Suddenly an alarm sounds and the next thing we know we are in another situation. $% \left(1\right) =\left(1\right) ^{2}$

ALARM INTRUDER ALERT! INTRUDER ALERT!

CHEKOV Deck five, Captain! Officer's quarters.



DECKER Temperature white hot! Cooling rapidly!

UHURA Captain! It's Ilia! She's taking a shower!

Instantly all the males are out of their chairs and fighting to get into the turbolift.

CUT TO:

INT -- ILIA'S QUARTERS

The door slides open and McCoy cautiously pokes his head into the room. He sees nothing but is suddenly pushed into the room by Kirk. Spock then follows them in. At first glance there is nothing but the sound of a shower running (maybe some singing, too?). Then, as they cross over towards the door leading to the shower room, Ilia suddenly smashes through the wall. She is wearing a shower cap. McCoy approaches her cautiously and removes the cap from her bald head. He examines it with his salt shaker, then...

MCCOY Jim, this is a mechanism!

ILIA (to Kirk) You are the Kirk unit. You will assist me.

At this point Decker comes into the scene and stares, shocked, at Ilia.

ILIA (seeing Decker) Dwekea.

SPOCK (seeing Kirk and McCoy)

Interesting. Dwekea, not Dwekea unit.

ILIA
I am sent by Nomad. Error, error. I am sent by V'ger.

am sent by V'ger

Who is V'ger?

ILIA That which seeks the creator.

KIRK Who is the creator?

ILIA
That which created V'ger. I am sent
by V'ger to study carbon based units
infesting USS Enterprise.

(points at Kirk)
You will assist me!

KIRK
(noticing door)
Noooo, I think...
(grabs Decker)
...this unit will assist you better.

Ilia takes one look at Decker and VOOM! they're gone. Kirk and McCoy exit. Hold on Spock for a moment then...

INT -- USS ENTERPRISE -- TRANSITIONAL SHOT WITH MUSIC

CUT TO:

INT -- THE ENTERPRISE -- KIRK'S QUARTERS

Kirk and McCoy are watching Ilia and Decker on the viewin screen. We cannot see what they see, but we $\underline{\mathsf{can}}$ hear it.

DECKER
(voice over)
You know, Ilia used to love it when I'd
lean over and whisper this in her ear.
(whispering sounds)
Then I'd put my hand on her right here.

ILIA (voice over)
No, please. Don't say that here. No, don't touch me there.

MCCOY (lecherously) Good, good. He's using audio/visual stimulation!

CUT TO:

ANOTHER PART OF THE SHIP -- CLOSE UP ON CREMAN

The crewman seems very intense on whatever he is doing. Suddenly a hand gently slips onto his shoulder and pinches it. The man's tongue sticks out as he goes unconscious. As he drops out of the frame we see Spock step into the frame. He looks down at the crewman on the floor, then blows his fingers like one does to the smoke from a just-fired weapon. After an aside to the camera he drops out of the frame.

CUT TO:

INT -- ILIA'S QUARTERS

Decker and Ilia are with Dr. Chapel. Dr. Chapel has removed something from Ilia's dresser.

DECKER
This used to mean a lot to Ilia.

Chapel sets a Mickey Mouse had onto Ilia's head.

CHAPEL It was one of her favorite things.

Ilia looks at herself in the mirror.

DECKER Remember? At Disney World?

ILIA (turning to Decker) Dwekea.

VOICES (chorus to the Delta Airline theme) Delta is ready when you are....

Decker develop a lecherous gleam in his eye. Dr. Chapel watches this scene for a moment, realizes what they're thinking.

CUT TO:



CHAPEL Commander! This is a mechanism!

Ilia, without even looking, suddenly pushes Chapel out the door, which slides shut a moment later.

> ILIA (to Decker) You may proceed.

> > CUT TO:

JUST OUTSIDE ILIA'S QUARTERS

Dr. Chapel is pounding on the door.

CHAPEL
Decker? Will? Is everything alright in there?

Suddenly the door flies open, the Mickey Mouse hat flies out and we hear Decker from inside just before the door closes. Dr. Chapel has a shocked expression at whatever she had just seen inside.

DECKER Whooooooppppppeeeeeee!

CUT TO:

NOTE: POSSIBLE ADDITIONAL SCENE OF SPOCK'S SPACE WALK COULD GO HERT IF IT IS DEEMED FEASIBLE. IT WOULD HAVE TO END WITH A...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT -- USS ENTERPRISE -- THE BRIDGE

Kirk is again seated in his chair going over whatever when Spock, wearing a space suit, the helmet under his arm, enters the bridge and stands beside him.

 $$\sf SPOCK$$ I was in contact with the alien, Captain.

KIRK (totally surprised) You were?

SPOCK
Yes. V'ger has amassed fantastic amounts
of information from its journey throughout the universe.

KIRK You were outside the ship?

SPOCK Yes, Captain. I entered the next chamber where I discovered that V'ger is a living machine.

KIRK You left the ship and you didn't tell me?

SPOCK I mindmelded with the giant image of Ilia and found out that V'ger wants to join with the creator.

 $$\operatorname{KIRK}$$ I don't understand. I thought I was in command here. I mean, I'm the captain, what more can I do.

 $$\mathsf{POCK}$$ That's the question V'ger is asking.

Ilia and Decker enter the bridge just in time to hear $\operatorname{\mathsf{Spock}}\nolimits$.

SPOCK (continuing)
I'm glad you understand the problem,
Captain.

DECKER So what's the answer?

KIRK I don't know the question.

CHEKOV
Captain! We've reached Earth and I'm picking up transmissions. Earth's defences are completely inoperative!

ILIA The carbon based units must be destroyed unless the creator answers.

KIRK (getting an idea) I know why the creator has not answered.

Both Decker and Ilia react with surprise to Kirk's line.

(continuing)
But that information can be disclosed only to V'ger. Not to a PROBE.

Ilia points toward screen.

V'ger.

All look up as we do a...

SWISH PAN TO:

THE V'GER SET

Ilia stands with her finger pointing in the same manner as before (ie, she is pointing still at V'ger). But now we are outside the ship. Kirk, Spock, McCoy and Decker all stand and gaze down at V'ger. There is a moment of hesitation on their faces. It is only then that we see V'ger.

V'ger is a cheap looking, lousy cardboard propout of a 60's TV series. They cluster around it, looking it over. All around them is blackness except for the lights from above which shine down onto V'ger. It is only then do we begin to HEAR the SOUNDS OF V'GER. Stupid sounds. Spock examines the machine.

Captain, this is a probe, launched in the late 1970's.

KIRK
That's why the creator doesn't answer.
No one now can understand the old style radio.

radio.
(into his communicator)
Kirk to Enterprise. Look up the code
for the Voyager series and transmit.

DECKER (reading from tricorder)
Code is, R-O-D, D-E-N, B-E-R, and the final sequence is R-Y.

SPOCK Roddenberry?

 $$\operatorname{KIRK}$$ Well, if this Roddenberry is the creator then let's get him.

 $$\operatorname{\textsc{MCCOY}}$$ He's in for one hell of a disappointment.

SPOCK Perhaps not, Doctor.

It is only then that Kirk notices something written on the side of the $V\ ger\ unit.$

KIRK Wait a minute. There's something written here.

(rubbing off the air)
P-A-R-A, Mount. Paramount. Paramount
Pictures! Spock, this is an old TV prop!

Spock takes the others aside from Ilia. Together they make a little huddle, which Ilia ignores.

SPOCK Captain, I believe V'ger wishes to make contact with the creator so that it can join with the other episodes in syndication.

MCCOY Of course. Eternal life, eternal youth. Is that possible? DECKER Let's find out!

Decker suddenly breaks away from the rest of the group. Kirk goes after him.

KIRK
Decker, don't! You don't know what
you're doing!

Ilea intervenes and shoves Kirk backwards, where he is caught and held back by Spock and McCoy.

DECKER Oh, yes I do. I've seen your reruns and I want a hit series of my own to star in.

KIRK
Don't be a fool. You'll be typecast for the rest of your life.

DECKER Jim, I want this. As much as you wanted a role in a big budget feature film, I want this!

Decker connects the wires on V'ger, then suddenly things begin to shimmer. Music plays as Decker and the Ilia probe merge. Music swells as Kirk, Spock, and McCoy make their way back to the ship.

CUT TO:

FANTASTIC SPECIAL EFFECTS SEQUENCE

CUT TO:

INT -- USS ENTERPRISE -- THE BRIDGE

Kirk, Spock, and McCoy enter. Kirk takes his place in his chair and looks at the screen. McCoy and Spock stand behind him.

KIRK Spock, did we see what I think we just saw?

SPOCK
Yes, Captain. We may have just witnessed the birth of a new series.

MCCOY
Well, it's been a long time since I
delivered a pilot. I hope we got this
one off to a good start.

UHURA
Captain, I have Paramount Pictures on line one, sir. They're planning a spin-off. They want their sets back.

CHEKOV Not back to TV?

SULU Heading, Captain?

Kirk leans forward and stares into the screen ahead.

KIRK Somewhere, out there. (something catches his eye) Thataway!

SWISH PAN TO:

AN ASTEROID -- WHICH READS "SEQUELS"

CUT TO:

EXT -- THE USS ENTERPRISE -- PASSING ASTEROID

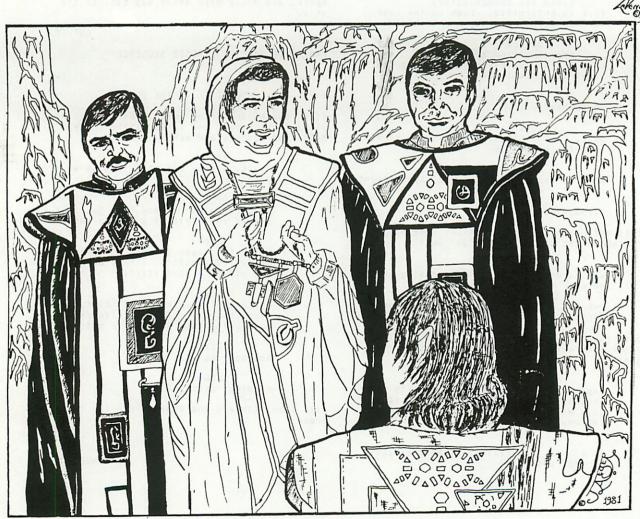
The music swells as the huge ships slowly turns and breaks off into hyperspace, sucking the asteroid in with it. We hear the sounds of CHEKOV'S SCREAM and the credits roll.

FADE OUT:

THE END

 $^{\circ}$

"Bones, I'm beginning to understand why you don't trust the transporter!"





"Well, Lori, what do you think of Captain Kirk?" Admiral Heihachiro Nogura gestured to Lori Ciani as he spoke, and she hurriedly accepted the seat before his desk.

"I am very impressed, sir. Up until now I had assumed no man can do even a part of everything - that there's no such thing as 'renaissance man.' But Jim Kirk must be the closest thing I've ever come to one. His command of the *Enterprise* has been nothing short of phenomenal."

"And personally?" Nogura enquired. He was not looking at her, but Lori was sure he knew he was putting her on the spot. In fact, she'd been entertaining the most intricate fantasy about Kirk when Nogura had called her into his office.

"Equally impressive," she decided to say and evade the question. She knew Nogura wanted her feelings. "His officers seem completely loyal to him as a man. I'd like to know what has made him and the Vulcan such good friends."

Nogura turned a stylus in his hands thoughtfully. "Lori, we need Kirk here at Headquarters. A 'hero' such as he is, with his skills, can be just the advantage Starfleet needs in order to retain our prestige--prestige we are in danger of losing."

His meaning was clear; Lori was his representative to the New Humans and saw everyday how the image of Starfleet among such groups had diminished. Yet she had to protest. "Kirk isn't going to want a staff job, sir. He seems very much at home on his starship, out in deep space."

"The Promotion Board feels otherwise. They have decided to promote him to Admiral and put him to work here." Nogura put up a hand to forestall her protest.

"I'm giving you the job of getting him to accept that decision."

She was momentarily speechless. "I don't see how I can do that," she told

him finally.

"You are my special emissary to the New Humans, Protocol Officer, and a trained diplomat, in addition to being xeno-psychologist for Non-Human relations. Handling a man like Kirk ought to be simple."

"I can do it, sir," Lori replied stiffly, even while knowing he had manipulated her into accepting the responsibility. She left the office moments later, re-

solved against her better judgment to do the job successfully.

Fortunately, Jim Kirk seemed determined to make her job, if not simple, at least pleasant. Lori looked up from her desk late that afternoon to see him in her doorway.

"Good afternoon, Admiral," he said with a smile. "Mind if I bother you for

a few minutes?"

"Not at all," she smiled back. Come into my parlor... "What can I do for

you ?" She gestured to her visitor's chair, and he took the seat easily.

"I've been reading over your recommendations for the supplementary training program for Contact Teams, and I was wondering about a few things. Do you really believe every starship officer needs to participate in this training?"

"Certainly."

"It's going to take a lot of time and effort away from an already heavy schedule of scientific duties and current ship training. I'm not sure we can afford this much additional time." He was frowning slightly. "Have you ever served on a starship, Admiral?"

"My experience is limited," Lori admitted. "The problem is, however, that as the Federation grows, we are constantly in touch with new races. We cannot permit

the possible consequences of the ignorant actions of even one person."

"I'm aware of that," he replied swiftly. "I've seen enough of that kind of problem. But have you considered there might be better ways to go about handling it?"

"I've thought of several. What do you suggest?" She was intrigued by what he might have in mind. Did the famous Kirk skill extend even into xeno-psychology? Apparently it did. He had several very pertinent suggestions to make about her proposal and a different outlook on the matter than anyone else had previously expressed. Within a short time she was asking him questions, and Lori began to wonder if she would have to scrap her entire program.

It was over half an hour before Kirk finally left. He suddenly rose saying, "I'm sorry. I didn't intend to take so much of your time." He gave her a smile of apology which somehow made Lori feel she'd been the one at fault. "However, this was so important to starships, I felt I had to let you know as long as I

had the chance."

"I understand," she said as she rose after him. "Your point of view is extremely helpful. I wish I had someone here on the staff to work with when I develop such programs." Might as well drop the seed of the idea now.

Kirk was surprised. "Don't you?"

"Not really. It's hard to get deep space veterans to take staff jobs--

they like to be in space."

"I understand that." He smiled again, and she was once more warmed by the sincerity of that smile. "Yet if these things were worked out before we have to deal with them, it would make our job a lot smoother."

"We keep trying, Captain. Your advice will help a great deal. If you think of anything else, be sure to let me know." She was not going to dislodge that small seed by pressing now. Obviously Nogura had not yet told Kirk of the coming promotion.

'Good-bye, Admiral. Thank you again for the time." Kirk made his way out

through the other office, and Lori stood watching him from her doorway.

"Very impressive," she thought again to herself, then blushed. It was more his physical presence she was thinking of as she watched his back retreat than his command presence.

The next morning Lori found a private memo on her desk to the effect that Nogura was going to inform Kirk of his promotion at the briefing that morning. She knew what was meant: she was to take charge of Kirk immediately. Only let Kirk get back to his ship without some sort of push and Nogura might lose him. He'd have no incentive to accept the rapid promotion and a lot of incentive to stay right where he was.

Resenting the deviousness of the necessity to do this, Lori sat down to make her plans. She had to let Kirk see the needs at Headquarters and to show him that he was the one man for the job. What would be best? To show Kirk the areas that really needed his help first, or to show him the ones that were succeeding? She rubbed her chin and thought. Finally she decided to shock him first with the dismal areas that really needed sound advice. With the sight of those errors and obvious mistakes preying on his mind, the impact of the successes would then be stronger. Now, which departments would make the best demonstrations? Lori started

to scribble out notes, as if this were a report to the Commanding Admiral. It was less personal this way, and she could pretend that Kirk was not a fascinating person for whom this could very possibly be the worst thing to do.

It was nearly 1100 hours before she got a call from Nogura's yeoman. "Admiral Ciani, I was told to let you know that the meeting between Captain Kirk

and the admiral is about to end."

"Thank you, yeoman." Lori sat for a moment, then picked up some old reports

from her desk. Now to meet Kirk accidentally and put her plan into motion.

Kirk came walking out of Nogura's conference room just as Lori reached the main office. His eyes were distant, and he did not see her standing in the door-Lori had to put herself right in his path to get his notice.

"Excuse me, Lori," he said quickly. "I didn't see you."

She smiled warmly, noting his use of her name instead of her title. He must be truly distracted to forget that courtesy. "Congratulations, Jim. Looks like you've heard the good news."

Kirk's face took on a lopsided grin. "I haven't quite taken it all in yet,

I'm going to have to let this sink in slowly."

Lori laid down the reports, trying not to meet his eye. She picked up another file as camouflage, and said slowly, "I've an idea. Let me show you around a bit. Then we can get some lunch, and you can ask me anything you like." That's it: assume he's going to take the job, and pretty soon he'll assume it, too. "It's quite interesting to see what we do around here. The decisions we make are crucial, no matter what starship captains seem to think on occasion."

"That sounds perfect. You're sure you've got the time?"

"That's no problem. My schedule is pretty open for the next day or so." Lori led the way out of the office, talking all the while. The Fleet Deployment office was just down the hall, and she had decided to start there. It was neither a success nor a failure, but it was where Jim Kirk was most likely to be assigned. It would give him something to be thinking of, a sort of new home that would be

comforting when seeing everything else--a place to relate to.

Kirk was an intelligent man, and Lori did not want to make the mistake of pointing things out to him too obviously. If he ever realized how carefully she planned their tour, all her good intentions would go for nothing. Even so, she was startled at how quickly he picked up on the vast differences between the first part of the tour and the later sections. When they finally reached the Officer's Club for a very late lunch, she could see his mind was already worrying over the problem.

"Was that the usual situation in the Security Section?" he demanded as they took their seats. They had stumbled into the middle of some sort of confusion about training cadets. Lori hadn't quite followed what it was all about, but Kirk

obviously had.

"I don't get down there much, but I think that Commodore Minck is not considered an overly efficient officer," she said carefully, looking over her menu.

"Efficient! The man's a..." Kirk stopped, obviously not wanting to libel the man in front of her. "Has he ever served on a starship?" The question was one which had come up repeatedly. At first Lori had found it necessary to insert it into the conversation. Now Kirk asked it each time he met a new commander.

"Only on a class II cruiser. I'm afraid we don't have much tenure for Security personnel." For some reason she didn't know about, most of them were

very young.

"I'm not surprised," he said bitterly. "We lose enough of them from their own stupidity...or lack of training." It was a possibility he seemed to be considering for the first time.

Lori took advantage of the break to make her order, and Kirk quickly chose his lunch. For a time they were silent as they nursed their drinks; then Kirk

continued. "I see Charlie Svoboda has been put in charge of the Weapons Board. I was glad to see he's still in Starfleet. That radiation accident on the *Potemkin* was pretty bad."

Lori nodded. "He was in therapy for over a year, but he took over the Board while still in the hospital. He said it was good for him, and he was damned if

that sort of thing would ever happen again."

Kirk nodded thoughtfully, and Lori took a bite of her quiche, thinking it was

time to change the subject.

"Jim, you know xeno-psychology is my specialty. I'm interested in knowing a little about how you have found working with a Vulcan as your second in command." This was a little dangerous, getting him to think about his ship. But if he respected Spock as much as it seemed, she might get him thinking about Spock as captain.

Kirk's eyes lit up. He finished sipping his drink and said enthusiastically, "It's been the best thing that happened to me as captain. Without his aid, I

doubt we'd all be back here now."

"No problems with his differences in background?"

"I didn't say that, exactly," Kirk grinned. "I'll admit it took me awhile to get used to having him around. I wasn't in favor of having a Vulcan as one of my senior officers, even if he was a spectacular Science Officer. I didn't think he could handle the responsibility, or that I could depend on him like I could a human. I was wrong."

"I was impressed by his attention to detail at the debriefing the other day. But didn't your crew find that Vulcan precision can be too close to nit-picking

occasionally?"

Kirk laughed again. "Sure, so do I. When it gets to the irritating point, I tell him. He usually backs off, saying he was just trying to see I had complete information. We've all adjusted to it, just as we've learned to adjust to everyone else's little idiosyncracies."

Carefully not looking at him, Lori cut a bit and said, "Would you recommend him as a captain? He's never been recommended, even though he's been in the

service longer than you."

"I think he'd make a terrific captain."

"There are no primarily Vulcan ships without captains at the moment."

"I was unaware that we assigned ships on the basis of race," Kirk said

stiffly. "Spock can handle any ship."

"That's good to know. Despite my xeno-psych specialty, I have never worked with Vulcans. At times I must depend on what I learn from others. I feel your first-hand information will be reliable."

Kirk turned his glass thoughtfully in his hands for a moment, then asked, "Is it true you're Nogura's special emissary to the New Humans?" Lori nodded, intrigued that he knew this much about her. "Tell me about that. We get very little information about these new influences back here on Earth. The effects seem more obvious—and troublesome—up close than when reading reports on my ship."

Lori agreed. It was time to change the subject entirely. No more thinking about deep space or Headquarters. Let him see the challenges that the New Human movement represented right here on Earth. This planet was his true home after all; no man could live in space forever. They spent the rest of the afternoon talking over her job, then going from that to politics, and finally to everything either one could think of. Lori salved her conscience about her long stay away from the office by reminding herself Nogura had ordered her to make Kirk accept his promotion. She was beginning to wish personally that he would choose to stay; he was the most intriguing man she had ever met.

The next morning Nogura called her back to his office. "I think you should

know, Lori, that whatever you said to Captain Kirk was exactly right. He's let me

know that he will definitely accept the promotion."

Delight and regret warred briefly, but the regret lost out. "I'm pleased to hear that, Admiral. Has he said anything about his recommendation for his replacement?"

"He'll bring me the reports later. I've given him the codes he needs to review personnel files."

"You might like to know that I think he will recommend Commander Spock." Nogura gave her a sharp, indefinable look. "Why do you think that?"

"I told you I was intrigued by their friendship, so I asked him a little about it yesterday. Kirk was very enthusiastic in recommending Spock and in saying everyone on the ship accepts Spock's command readily. That could be an immense advantage in reconciling Jim...Admiral Kirk to his new position."

Nogura eyed her carefully, noting her slip in using Jim's name. Oh, well,

she reasoned, he must have known it would happen.

"That is very useful, Lori. Thank you." They spoke briefly for another moment, then Lori returned to her work. Contrary to what she had told Kirk the day before, her schedule was not very open, and she had a conference in Washington to attend the next day. She was not prepared for it.

The Washington Conference somehow extended into two days, which were then interrupted by an emergency call to Singapore, followed by another to Tehran. Consequently it was over a week before Lori was back to San Francisco. During that time she'd put Jim Kirk to the back of her mind, and the only thing she really

wondered about was if he would take his leave before she returned.

Arriving early at her office the day of her return, Lori was apalled by the amount of correspondence she would have to look over. There was also a small pile of private memos from Nogura. She sighed and plunged into those, only to find herself dismayed. Spock had quit the service in protest against Kirk's promotion and his own promotion to captain of the *Enterprise*. One of the notes on the subject indicated that several officers, including Kirk's Chief Medical Officer, also objected. The general opinion seemed to be that Kirk's profile showed him to be suited primarily for command and deep space, and that promoting him at this point was both unfair to him and a loss to space commands.

At the bottom of the pile was a short note from Nogura, written in general but non-ambiguous terms. "Lori, these notes are for your personal use. It is still important that James Kirk become a useful member of my staff, and I'm giving you the continuing responsibility of giving him the guidance and help necessary to make the transition. Do what you need to in order to keep him on

the team."

Lori bit her lip in chagrin. It had never occurred to her that Nogura would promote Kirk against so much expert advice. Why hadn't the Promotion Board stopped this? The answer struck her almost immediately: because Nogura had selected and assigned most of them. They were sure to follow his recommendations, particularly in light of Kirk's obvious public relations value. With a sigh, Lori looked back to the note. Kirk was still her responsibility, despite her absence for several days. What was he thinking now? If she could not keep him happy at Starfleet, was Nogura going to blame her?

Immediately Lori's hand went to her desk-com. "Yeoman, can you tell me if

Admiral Kirk is in the building?"

"Just a moment." There was a pause as the yeoman checked up on the daily

report. "Yes, ma'am. He's scheduled to be in his office all day."

"Thank you." Lori turned back to the reports and read them over again less quickly. She wanted to know the exact situation before she went to see Jim.

Jim Kirk sat at his desk, reviewing a large stack of reports and briefings.



It was proving harder than he had anticipated to settle into the routine of his office. Too many things were new to him. On the ship, he thought, I always knew exactly what I wanted and when I wanted it. But then, I've served on ships almost from the day I graduated from the Academy. All I need is some experience and practice. He paused in his thinking and was honest with himself, ... And maybe a good deputy. I never appreciated before how much help it was to have Spock weed through things before I made decisions.

The thought of Spock made him pause in his reading. Kirk was no longer as angry as he had been when Spock refused to take the captaincy of the Enterprise, but he was just as puzzled and hurt. He knew how much it meant to me. Why couldn't Spock do that for me? And what did I do wrong that made him leave Earth forever? Kirk shook his head and tried to force his attention back to his work. He'd been all over this a hundred times since Spock had abruptly resigned Starfleet a week earlier, and he was no nearer understanding than he'd been then.

The sliding of his office door opening attracted his attention, and Kirk looked up questioningly. "Hi," Lori Ciani said, peeking around the corner.

"How're things working out?"

Kirk was delighted to see her and gave her a warm smile. "I think I'm getting the idea of this," he said, rising and coming around the desk. "But there's an

awful lot of paperwork. I've never been much in favor of that."

Lori came all the way into the room, her fawnlike grace as she walked making his heart begin to pound quickly. She smiled back as she began to apologize. "Sorry I had to run out like that last week. There were a couple of emergency calls, and the Admiral wants every New Human problem met instantly." Her eyes were moving around the room in curiosity, and she gently touched the carved box on his desk as she spoke. The angular grace in her gesture was more attractive than he remembered from their brief acquaintance before she left.

"I had plenty to keep me busy. My predecessor was a pretty thorough report maker. Now that you're back, though, I'm sure I can find a moment or two I can work free." He smiled, suddenly quite sure he wanted to see more of Lori. "Can

I take you out for dinner tonight?"

"I'd love that, but..." she gave him an odd glance before saying, "...don't you have unused leave you should be taking? I thought all of your old crew had several weeks of accumulated leave."

Kirk shook his head. "I decided not to do that just yet. There is too much to see to here, and I still have the problem of the *Enterprise* to solve."

"Problem?"

"She needs a captain, though not in any great hurry. Scotty's in acting command, and the shipyard docks are studying her before they decided how to take her to pieces." That hurt, to think of his beautiful ship stripped down to her bones. Kirk forced himself not to grimace, and he looked steadily at Lori.

"Your Mr. Spock didn't take her, then?" Lori asked, meeting his eyes

sympathetically.

"Spock is no longer in Starfleet." He turned away, unable to meet that

sympathetic gaze without wanting to tell her everything about it.

"I see," Lori said, but she seemed startled. Kirk wondered what she didn't understand, as she went on, "As to that dinner date, I get off duty today at 1730 hours. Shall we say an hour or so to get cleaned up, and I'll meet you at the Officer's Lounge?"

Kirk gave her a nod. "That's fine with me. Now, I'd better see if I can make some sense out of these reports before the staff meeting this afternoon."

"See you later, Jim." Lori disappeared as lightly as she had come. Kirk found himself thinking of her fondly for several minutes before he could get back to work.

To Kirk's surprise, he enjoyed the dinner with Lori far more than he had

anticipated. She was that rare combination, a good listener and an interesting conversationalist. They found many interests in common, and Kirk could feel the unaccustomed weight of the past days fall away from his mind as he relaxed. By the time they were leaving the Lounge he felt the return of the self-confidence he usually had before taking this new job.

They had discovered that their quarters were in the same building, though on different floors. It was not far across the starbase from the club, and they walked along the shaded streets in the brisk evening air. Beside Kirk, Lori shivered slightly, and he took her arm, pulling her closer. She did not pull away.

"Being in the same building should prove handy," he said as they rode up in

the lift.

Lori met his smile with a shy one of her own, giving him a sideways glance with her large brown eyes. "Would you believe me if I said that I arranged it?"

Kirk laughed. "No, but it's a nice thought. It means we can see a lot more of each other than if we lived on opposite sides of the base. And I do want to see more of you, Lori." The door opened on Lori's floor, and they crossed the corridor to her apartment.

"Won't you come in?" she asked, keying the door to open. As they walked into the room the sensiplates noted their arrival and turned on the lights. Kirk looked around appreciatively. She'd managed to transform the basically bleak service quarters into a comfortable home.

"Very nice," he said. "Makes mine feel even more new and empty by comparison." "Give yourself time," answered Lori, putting down her wrap beside the fire-

place. She sat and gestured to him to sit beside her. The fireplace bench was littered with pillows that Kirk scattered as he settled down. "I do a lot of traveling, and I need a place to come home to."

"I understand that," he replied. "Everyone needs to belong somewhere."

"Aren't we lucky to have Starfleet?" Lori asked quickly.

"Aren't we, though." But for a moment, he was not thinking of Starfleet in general, but of a white ship among the stars. He had to change the subject quickly. "I'm curious as to why we never met before. Did you attend the Academy?"

"Only for my final year. I started out training with the Diplomatic Corps and got involved in xeno-psychology. As part of my training I had some work with Starfleet officers, and that got me interested in the Service. I decided to switch when I realized I could get a lot of practical experience much faster in Starfleet. There's a lot less ceremony involved."

"Don't tell me about diplomats," he laughed. "They've been the source of a lot of my troubles. Now I guess I'll have a different set of problems." He reached across and took one of her hands in his. "I'm glad you're back, Lori,

even if you are a diplomat."

She gave him a warm smile back, squeezing his hand gently. "I thought of you while I was gone, Jim. It made me sorry to think you might be on leave when I returned."

"I'd rather wait for leave until you can join me," Kirk answered, taking her

hand to his lips and kissing the fingers softly.

She withdrew her hand sharply. "Join you on leave?"

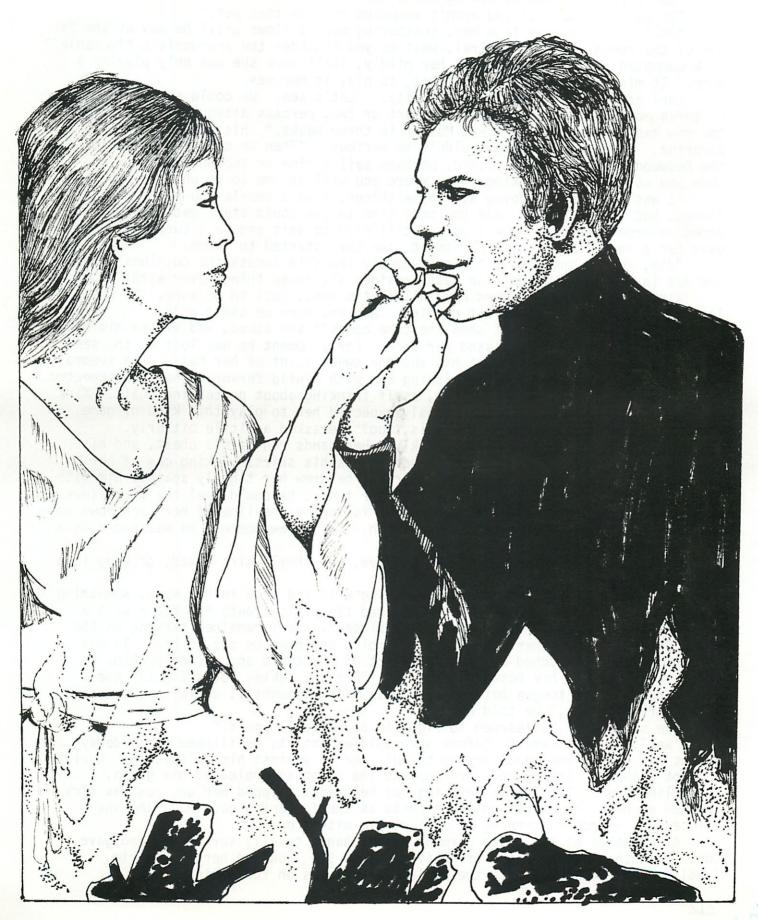
"Who a would you like to go?" He was teasing, but only partly. He was aware of his heart pounding again, thinking of her beside him on the beach or skiing down the mountains in Europe.

"Aren't you getting along a bit fast?" she asked coldly.

"If you say so." Quite sure that her indignation was pretended, he pulled

her closer to him, kissing her neck.

"Now wait a minute," she began and backed away. Then their eyes met, and he grinned at her. Lori bit her lip, struggling to keep back her own grin. makes you think..." She couldn't go on as a giggle burst out, and Kirk chuckled



back at her. "What makes you think I want to go on leave with you?" "Don't you?" he asked, giving her a smile.

"Of course I do, but you aren't supposed to know that yet."

"Oh." He slid away from her, scattering more pillows until he was at the far end of the bench. "Well, Admiral, what do you consider the appropriate timetable?" Kirk composed his face to look at her mildly, still sure she was only playing a game. It might be interesting at that, to play it her way.

Lori gave him a look of mock dignity. "Let's see. We could still have two or three more dinner dates, see a concert or two, perhaps attend the opening of the new exhibit at the Starfleet Museum in three weeks." His eyes widened in surprise. Three weeks - she couldn't be serious. "Then we could drive up into the Redwood Preserve for a picnic, perhaps sail a time or two on the Bay. And then you could start thinking about where you will ask me to go on leave."

"I was planning on doing all those things, plus a couple you haven't mentioned; but I thought I'd save you some time so you could start getting your schedule organized now. Now I guess it'll have to wait and be a surprise." He

gave her a look of mock disappointment, and Lori started to laugh.

"Jim, you're incredible!" And suddenly she slid across the cushions to him and was in his arms. "Shall we just consider all those things over with?"

Kirk drew back and looked her full in the eyes, just to be sure. "I was

looking forward to that exhibit opening. Are you sure we can't go?"

"Can we talk about that when the time comes?" she asked, and kissed him hard.

With a chuckle, Kirk kissed her back. For a moment he was lost in the sensation of her warm body against his and the sweet scent of her hair. She seemed to melt right into his embrace, kissing him with a wild fervor he had not expected. Then he felt her pull away slightly, as if thinking about protesting again. Kirk was disappointed. He had not seriously expected her to play this kind of game.

"Do you have a timetable for this, too?" he asked a little bitterly.

"Not for you," she answered quickly. Her hands ran up his chest, and his chest muscles quivered to her soft touch across his shirt. Taking one of her hands in his again, he kissed her fingers as he drew her tightly against him with his other arm. Through the fine silk of her tunic, he could feel the firm lines of her back. His hand caressed her there, following the line of her back down and across the thin material covering her thigh. For a few moments he was aware only of Lori's body against his.

"These pillows aren't merely decorative, are they?" Kirk asked, drawing in a

shuddering breath.

"Try one and see." There was something wild and free in her eyes, something that had not been there earlier. He brushed the pillows onto the floor with a sweep of one arm, then rolled down there himself. Lori remained sitting on the bench until he caught her sideways and tumbled her down on top of him. To his startlement, Lori hitched up the long skirt of the tunic and straddled him, effectively pinning him between her legs. "Are you asking for a fight?" she asked, running her tongue between her lips. Kirk thought it definite provocation.

"I fight dirty," he told her.

She shrugged. "I learned to fight in Starfleet, myself."

"Well, in that case." Before she could expect it, he flipped her sideways and caught her arm in one hand, trying to pull her up against him helplessly. Lori was not trapped. She pushed hard against the thumb and released his grasp, scrambling away. The long, loose legs of her pants tripped her up, just as Kirk grabbed at her. He caught only the pants as the fastening gave way, and she slipped out of reach, turning to look at him with a grin.

Kirk looked at the silky garment in his hand, totally surprised, and gave Lori the chance to be on the offensive again. She launched herself at him,

tumbling them both over onto the pillows. Lori was on top again.

"You won't catch me like that twice," she grinned.

"I don't think I want to get away from you," he pointed out. "Now that you've got me, what do you intend to do with me?"

"Even the odds." Lori pulled on the fastenings of his shirt, and Kirk found

himself barechested.

"That's not even," he protested, and he pulled at her tunic to release it. It tore loose in his grasp. "Ah, you don't spend a lot of money on clothes, do you?" he asked in surprise. Lori had nothing on underneath.

"I dress for the occasion." She quickly shed the few remaining pieces of her

clothes. "Don't you think you're a little overdressed?"

"Now that you mention it, the thought was beginning to occur to me. What

do you suggest?"

"Nothing much, just remove a thing or two." She dropped to one side, allowing him to remove the open shirt. "I said two," she reminded him as he lay back again.

"Impatience is not a virtue," he chided her; but the rest of his clothes soon

joined hers in a pile beside the bench.

"You started it."

"So I did. Then I must remedy it. I won't hurry any more this evening." Kirk rolled back against the pillows and stretched out with his hands behind his head. "Got anything to drink?"

"Jim!" He suddenly found Lori back in his arms.

"Now what are you complaining about?" He raised his hands in mock despair, teasing her with a carefree grin. "Some women never know what they want."

"And some men never know how to tell," she countered.

"Fair enough." This game had gone on long enough. Kirk knew he could not tease her, or himself, any longer. "Shall I tell you what I want?" She nodded. "You." And he pulled her once again into his embrace. Lori did not pull away again.

Over the next few months, Kirk found himself spending more and more of his free time with Lori. He had settled into the routine of his office work, but it never captured the whole of his attention the way being a starship captain had done. He was able to work his office staff to good advantage, and he was aware that they worked as hard for him as had his ship's crew. Yet, he never felt the same companionable response to any of them that he had once felt for his ship's officers. He noticed that even his relationship with Lori was not as satisfying while on the job. When he met her eyes during a staff meeting or spoke to her in Nogura's office, there was rarely a smile or a private glance for them to share.

When they were alone, however, their comfortable companionship returned. She opened up to him readily, and he then felt able to tease her and joke as he had the first night they spent together. Somehow, with their two very busy schedules, they found many chances to get away from the routine of Headquarters and do something active: skiing, hiking, sailing. Whenever there were two or three days in a row when both could get free, Kirk had dozens of ideas of things he wanted to do. His daydreams aloft had been of warm beaches and bright sun. Lori was willing to live all those daydreams with him. Occasionally she tried to get him to spend a weekend at home, not understanding that his way of relaxing was to spend energy on something totally different than his work.

"Jim?" she asked him one day. They were on the beach at Maui, watching the sun go down across the ocean as the clouds rolled behind them off the mountain. "How on earth did you ever stand being cooped up on a starship? It seems as

though this whole world isn't big enough to hold you."

"There were compensations," he said flatly, thinking that no one who had never commanded a starship could possibly understand. Then he remembered that Lori was a xeno-psychologist and turned to meet her eyes. She was giving him a

long, studying look. He kissed her quickly.

Lori snuggled against him, her warm, sandy body against his on one side, fitting into the curved place under his arm. "Remember that leave we said we'd take, one of these days?"

"Isn't this leave?" he teased her.

"Two days? Hardly. I mean a real leave - cleared desk with no calls for a

couple of weeks."

"Just say the word. You're the one with the unpredictable schedule. My days are usually predictable, right down to the last minutes." Predictable, that was the problem. For a moment he felt the touch of despair, then shoved it back in his mind. He leaned over and kissed her nose.

"I have a conference in Warsaw for three days next week. After that I've

tried to keep my calendar clear."

"Mmmmm. I'll have to check my own calendar, but I'm sure I could arrange to meet you there. I've never been to Warsaw, or much of eastern Europe." This was giving him several ideas. "I'll figure out a few places to visit, and maybe we could go skiing in the Alps later."

Lori pulled herself away from him and sat up. Kirk felt unaccountably cold along that side. "I'll count on it, Jim. Now, I'm getting hungry. I think I'll

go back to our room and get cleaned up. My hair is a mess."

He ruffled the short waves with his hand. "I like it that way. But you go on and wash. I'll follow you in a few minutes." Lori understood his need for moments of solitude, and she smiled. Gathering up her towel and sandals, she walked back across the sand toward their cottage. Kirk's eyes followed her figure making her way on the uneven ground, and for a moment he wondered if she really wanted to go to dinner immediately. He felt very content with his life.

As Lori stepped onto the grass by the cottage, she dropped the book out of her bag. Before she could stop to pick it up, a man walking along the edge of the beach bent down and picked it up for her. With a heart-stopping wrench, Kirk saw he was a Vulcan. For a brief moment, he wondered if the man were Spock. Then after a polite interchange with Lori, the man walked off; and Kirk saw it was a

stranger.

Kirk realized he had sat up rigidly and forced himself to settle back down on his towel. It had been a long time since he had permitted himself to think of Spock, and he was surprised now to realize he was no longer angry with his distant friend. The peace and calm that Lori and the sun had given him made him think more kindly of Spock's refusal to accept the ship. Why did I even think it was so important? Kirk wondered to himself. I've found Will Decker to be Captain, and he'll be a wonder. Spock and I should be working together, a team as we were before. I miss him. Maybe when I get home, I'll write him a letter. We were good friends once, and I shouldn't let this stop that. No matter what he's doing on Vulcan, we could at least be friends again. The thought put the cap on the day. Kirk gathered up his possessions and followed Lori back to their cottage. He felt terrific.

Lori was very glad that she had been able to work out the long leave time following her conference. Naturally her meeting went on longer than the scheduled three days, and Jim arrived in Warsaw before she was ready to join him. But he explored a little on his own while she worked, and then they were free. Even Lori was pleased to be away from Admiral Nogura and his demands. For two weeks they "followed the sun", going where they pleased and doing only as they wished. The stresses of Starfleet were far away.

That did not mean, however, that they idled away their time. As always, Jim Kirk tried to pack everything that he could do into the time available. Eventually, it began to feel to Lori as if he were trying to escape from something she didn't

understand. She realized how much he missed his life aboard the starship, far more intensely than even he was aware of. Remembering his profile and the notes she had received after his promotion, she wondered if Jim were far less suited to flag rank than anyone suspected. He seemed to be running away from his responsibilities as a staff admiral. No, she corrected herself, simply comparing his performance there with his proven abilities as a starship captain and suffering in the comparison. Lori also knew that no one else considered him inadequate; but because he could not be the best admiral, in the same way he had been the best captain, Jim was unhappy with himself. Lori was afraid that this would not continue much longer. Either Jim would withdraw into himself and passively accept the position, or quit and find a ship of his own to command. Either way Nogura would lose his prize exhibit, and Lori would be in trouble. She didn't know what she was going to do.

In trying to avoid a decision, Lori was not inclined to make Jim relax on their travels. Consequently, they were both exhausted when they finally returned to San Francisco. To make matters even worse, Lori had not been able to sleep at all in the tube ride from Gibralter. The 84 minute trip had been totally disrupted by a crying baby and a bratty little toddler. Neither child had settled into the weightlessness of the descent or the stress of the ascent. Lori had withdrawn to the far side of the cabin, though Jim had played with the older child while the mother rocked the baby. It was quite late at night when their airtram from the Los Angeles station finally dropped them off in San Francisco. time the hired car had deposited them at their building, it was almost dawn.

"A place to come home to," Jim said quietly as they paid off the driver and

struggled with their luggage.

Lori was a little surprised. He'd never called his apartment home before. "I'm glad to be back, too. That's part of the fun of holidays."

They made their way into the dim and deserted lobby. Lori stopped for their

mail while Jim loaded the bags onto a cart to send up in the lift.

"Jim, you have a letter from Vulcan," she said in surprise. She heard him drop a bag on his way over to snatch the envelope out of her hand. Ripping it open, he pulled out the contents; his face fell as he scanned it, the eager expression replaced by one of severe disappointment. "What's wrong," she asked gently.

"Let's get upstairs," he said roughly and turned back to the lift.

Lori followed, grimly determined to get this out in the open. They stopped first on her floor, and Kirk helped her to the door. He seemed about to leave as soon as he saw she was settled, but she forestalled that. "Jim, will you tell me what's the matter?"

"Do you know what Gol is?" was all he asked.

She shook her head. "Is it Vulcan? I told you I don't know anything about Vulcans."

"Do you think any of your books might have something? I need to know, Lori."

Dropping the letter on a table, he crossed the room to her desk.

"Try the bottom shelf. I should have a cassette or two about Vulcan. If Gol is important, it will be discussed." He turned to search, his back toward her, and Lori picked up the letter.

"Dear Jim," she read. "Please do not expect a reply to your letter to Spock. I am sorry to have to tell you he has left home to join the community at Gol. You

might say that is the Vulcan equivalent of a monastery.

"Since Spock returned from Starfleet, his behavior has been difficult to understand. He seems determined to forget his human heritage and to avoid any human contact at all. I realize that something must have driven him away from you and Starfleet, so I am keeping your letter unopened to give to Spock should he come home.

"I truly wish I could do more than this. If I learn of anything, I will be sure to write again. In the meantime, please accept my congratulations on your new post in Starfleet. Peace and long life, Amanda."

"Who's Amanda?" Lori asked.

"Spock's mother." Jim had found the Vulcan cassette and was running it through quickly on her desk viewer. "Here, I've found something. 'It is not likely that the average Federation official will ever have the opportunity to meet one of the Master at Gol. Should the occasion arise, it must be remembered that the Masters are to be awarded the highest honor and decorum. A Master at Gol outranks any other Vulcan standing, except the Prime Counselor of the High Council."

"That's not much to go on," Lori said critically. "It certainly sounds

impressive, but doesn't explain why Spock can't answer your letter."

"There's a footnote." Jim readjusted the viewer and read again. "'Gol is one area of Vulcan totally restricted to outworlders. Our information seems to indicate that it is a quasi-religious group similar in function to an ancient monastery or retreat.'" Jim chewed his bottom lip thoughtfully.

Lori decided she'd had enough. If Spock had done something to Jim, she wanted to know about it. The hurt expression on his face alone was enough to make her want to breach those restrictions at Gol and confront Spock, if that would help.

"Jim, why did Spock leave the Enterprise?"

He reached down to the viewer and removed the cassette, staring at it blankly. At first she thought he wouldn't speak, then he said, "He refused to be the captain."

"That doesn't make sense."

Kirk shrugged. "That's all I know about it. He didn't even say goodbye to me. When I told him I was taking the position on Nogura's staff, we argued. He thought I should stay as captain, and he told me flat out he would not be the new captain." He turned and walked past Lori, but not before she had seen the bleak expression reflected in his eyes. "I thought he was just trying to use that as a lever to get me to stay; he knew what it meant for me to have him take over my ship. So I put his name on the top of the list I gave to Nogura. I didn't think he'd refuse when he saw it was inevitable."

"But he did?"

"He not only refused, he resigned. Right there; three hours later he was on a shuttle to Vulcan. Why, I don't know. He didn't speak to me after that."

"Spock didn't even leave a message?"

"None." The hurt of that single word was almost more than Lori could stand to hear. She went up behind Jim and put her arms around him. He turned back to her and held her tightly. "Lori, for five years we had been as close as I thought it possible for two men to be. I never understood what changed that. Finally I decided I had to find out why. That's when I wrote that letter."

"This seems pretty final."

"Yes, it does." Kirk picked up the letter carefully and tucked it into a pocket. "Still, I am going to try one last thing. I'll find out what Gol really is. Maybe after a sort of novice period, I'll be able to write to Spock again."

If Spock had been in the room at that moment, Lori would probably have slapped him. Despite all Spock had done to hurt Jim, the caring and love still remained. She thought Jim would miss his friend for the rest of his life, and her heart ached for him. Putting her hand on his arm, she said, "Don't go up to your place yet. Stay with me tonight."

Kirk shook his head. "I think I'd rather just be alone for awhile. We've had a busy couple of weeks, and we have to be on duty tomorrow. You need some sleep

after that tube ride."

"If you're sure, Jim." She reached up and kissed him. "Good night." "Sleep well, Lori. I'll see you at the office. I think I'll go over to

the Alienologist's office and see what more I can find out. I need to know." He

disappeared out the door with his baggage.

Lori collapsed into bed, thinking furiously about Jim. The vacation had been a wonderful holiday, exciting and filled with chances for them to learn much about each other. Jim had become very dear to her, in a way difficult to explain, and she thought he was beginning to feel the same way about her. She felt the ache in her heart for him increase.

Remembering his eager reaching out for the letter and the deep disappointment at its contents, Lori wondered what would happen next. Jim had written to his old friend trying to recapture something lost and had been rebuffed. Obviously he needed something she could not provide. As sleep slowly overcame her, Lori made a resolution. Whatever help Jim needed from her, he could have. She cared enough about him that she would do whatever he wanted if it would help lift some of the weight on his spirits.

Lori was greeted at work the next day by an almost overwhelming pile of correspondence, files, and office memos. She immediately put her mind to business, and it was late in the afternoon before she realized that Jim hadn't contacted her yet. I wonder if he learned anything at the Alienologist's office, she thought, as she started to clear her desk before leaving for the day. The thought made her curious enough to look through her office records to see if she could find any reference to Gol. She was still leafing through one volume when Kirk appeared at her door.

"Hi, ready to leave?" he asked.

Lori quickly set the book back on the shelf. "I guess so. Some of this has been sitting here for two weeks. Another day can hardly matter." She joined him at the door and switched off the lights. "Where have you been all day?"

"Doing pretty much the same as you - catching up." He took her arm as they

walked across the lobby to the lift. "I did find time to visit Alienology."

"Learn anything?"

"Enough." His voice sounded carefully controlled, only a hint of dismay escaping. "The community at Gol is a very select group which designs the disciplines that enable Vulcans to overcome their emotions. Spock always felt his human side to be a handicap. I can see why Gol would appeal to him."

"You don't think you'll ever hear from him then?"

"I might. I don't suppose it would be the same, though." He shrugged, trying to appear unconcerned, and Lori's heart tugged again. "Might as well forget about him."

"I suppose that would be best." She tried to change the subject to something a little less emotional. "I called the commissary and had some groceries delivered this afternoon. Want to come to my place for supper?"

He gave her a small smile. "I'm not very hungry."

Lori decided to misread that remark. "I know. All that restaurant food has filled me up too much lately. I can just fix some sandwiches, and you can make a salad. OK?"

"You take good care of me, Lori." Jim took her hand and squeezed it. "OK.

I'll come for supper."

Going through the routine tasks of setting the table, fixing vegetables for a salad, and toasting bread, was a pleasant and easy way of forgetting the concerns that depressed him. Before long Kirk was back to his teasing self, and Lori gladly encouraged it. While he tossed the salad at the table, she lit a fire in her fireplace and set candles on the table. It felt very secure and comfortable in her tiny apartment.

After they ate, they settled down before the fire to watch the flames in the darkness. Neither spoke much, snuggled together among the pillows. Lori was almost

asleep and thought Jim was, too, when he spoke.

"Lori, have you ever given any thought to getting married?"

That startled her fully awake. "No, not really," she said slowly, wondering what he had in mind. "My work keeps me very busy, and I travel a lot. I've never wanted children, and I never thought of marriage for any other reason."

"And you've never met the right man?"

"Never before now," she said honestly and looked up into his eyes. "And you?" "I've thought of it a few times," he admitted. "Once or twice it was pretty serious, but somehow it never worked out. I'd given up thinking about it--until I met you. I enjoyed our leave together, Lori. You're a very special person."

"So are you, Jim, and we get along very well. But I'm content with things the way they are; marriage isn't necessary." She wasn't sure she loved him quite that

way, and she certainly did not want a family.

"We aren't really being very respectable, otherwise."

Lori stared at him. "Where did you get that ancient idea?"

"We're admirals, Lori. 'Starfleet's finest.' I've had a couple of hints dropped my way lately that what's OK for normal folks is not acceptable for us. People in power," his voice grew suddenly bitter, "can't live like others. We have to be perfect."

"Oh." Well, that idea certainly explained a few things. She settled back into the crook of his arm with a sigh. "And you think that means we ought to get

married?"

"Don't you?"

"Only assuming you could stand to live with me full time."

"I could do more than just stand it, Lori. I'd welcome it. We've spent all our free time together for weeks, and I find myself more and more fascinated by you." The easy gentle evening had disappeared. He leaned over and kissed her

hands. "I couldn't let you go from my life very easily."

"I've felt the same way for a long time, Jim," Lori replied as she returned the kiss with interest. Resolutely she pushed her doubts away, though she felt she had to qualify her answer. "I'll be willing to try being married for awhile-say a standard one year contract. You're pretty fascinating yourself, in case you didn't realize it."

For answer he drew her tightly into his arms, his lips seeking hers hungrily and pulling her close as if she might disappear from sight. Reassuring him, Lori wrapped her arms firmly around his back. Their bodies came together in the familiar way, his touch exciting her into longing for their complete union. They both needed each other, she realized, and was happy to think that his troubles would be lost in this new happiness between them. It was a long time before she even realized they had spoken of marriage and made their plans without either one of them speaking the word "love".

For Jim Kirk the next few months were happy, a time in which for the first time in years his personal life overshadowed his life in Starfleet. Actually marrying and living together instead of simply spending a good deal of time with one another was a new experience for both Kirk and Lori. There were days of settling in: choosing a new apartment, working out their living schedules, doing without time alone. Through it all, there was Lori helping him, giving him joy simply by being with him. From friend and lover she became wife and mother as well, the only partner he needed and wanted in his life.

At the same time, if he thought about it at all, Kirk realized that he was not putting all the thought into his staff job that he had into being a starship captain. He found he literally hated staff meetings and the necessary reports Headquarters demanded, but instead of fighting them, he handled them as quickly as possible by giving them to his staff to complete. Nor did he give anywhere near

as much of his off-duty time to work as he had always done in the past. Weekends and evenings were reserved for Lori, and Kirk resented any time that they were apart.

Yet, Lori's position as Nogura's special representative to the New Humans and a member of Starfleet's diplomatic corps meant that she was obligated to spend a great deal of time traveling. Usually this was on Earth, at conferences set up with the myriad of special interest groups which had contacts with Starfleet. During the first months of their marriage, Lori seemed able to keep these meetings to a minimum, and she was never called off-planet at all. Little by little, so slowly that at first Kirk was not aware of it, the number and length of her meetings increased. Federation conferences or academic symposiums became part of her responsibilities, and the inconvenience of being married to a diplomat grew more obvious.

Kirk was critical of diplomats. He had said so enough times in the past that he was not particularly welcome in diplomatic circles. So, despite his willingness and interest in sharing whatever Lori did, Kirk almost never accompanied Lori on her trips. Once or twice he arranged to go off-planet with her, but something always came up at Headquarters to prevent him going. Eventually it grew to be accepted between them that Lori's trips were her own, something in which Kirk had no part.

In order to fill the time that Lori had filled at first, Kirk slowly found himself paying more attention to his job. His duties as head of Fleet Deployment were numerous and complicated. Starfleet was large and growing larger, adding dozens of new ships and two entire starbases in the slightly over a year that Kirk had been at Headquarters. It meant constant work just to stay abreast of all the details. Someone in his office was on duty at all times, and Kirk began going to work earlier each morning and staying later in the evening as the weeks passed. Even Lori, who was also committed to her work, began to tease him about it, but it made no difference. Having gathered the reins of his office into his own hands, there seemed to be no way to relax his hold.

To his surprise, Kirk began to realize that he did not want to let go. Once when Lori returned from a lengthy trip with four days of leave due her, he found it impossible to take the time to spend those days with her. Lori made only a small protest. Days began to pass by when they didn't even see each other though they were both on the base at the same time. During their first few months Kirk had waited up for Lori if she were late, and she had done the same for him. Now he often came home to find her asleep. The hours each had stolen from their schedules to find time to be together grew fewer and fewer. Passionate hours once spent in each other's arms had gradually shrunk to a brief, desparate time of seeking intense ecstasy.

Kirk did not understand it. He still found Lori as exciting as ever, his pulse racing whenever he was near her. For him she still was perfection physically, one of the few women where love and sex came together for him. Lori seemed to feel the same way about him, responding eagerly to his touch--whenever they could make the time to be together. Kirk knew he needed her still but resentfully began to wonder if she needed him, or in fact ever had. As the stipulated year of the marriage drew to a close, Kirk wasn't sure what they would do next. As he had done so often lately, Kirk avoided the topic in his mind.

It was still fairly early one afternoon when Kirk returned to their apartment. He had been intending to work later, but his yeoman had unaccountably managed to clear his desk by the end of duty hours. Wearily he rode up in the lift, with some thought of sitting and doing nothing all weekend; even his customary exercise seemed too much to handle. To his surprise, Lori was home before him. Dressed in a most uncustomary dress and apron, she hurried out of the dining area to greet him.

Kirk frowned in puzzlement. "Have I forgotten something--an invitation or a celebration of some sort?"

Lori kissed him and shook her head. "Nothing like that. I just decided it

was time we spent an evening together, for a change."

Kirk walked across to the bar and made himself a drink. "I couldn't have faced company tonight. Do you know what happened about the Fleet maneuvers this morning?" He downed half the drink in a gulp.

"Nope. Don't want to know. We are not going to talk shop." Her wide eyes crinkled a little as she smiled, and she came over beside him. Kirk turned and

put his arm around her waist, following her into the cooking area.

"Whatever you say. What are you doing in here? It smells terrific."

"Morna gave me those recipes from the dinner we had at her place a while back. I thought I'd try them out. You seemed to like them pretty well." She gave him an unreadable glance. "Or was it simply the hostess you liked?"

"It was an excellent dinner," Kirk replied, wondering what made her ask it like that. He rested his hands on her hips as she turned toward the stove.

"Hmmm. This will be ready in about fifteen minutes. Why don't you get

changed while I finish up."

Kirk nuzzled the back of her neck for a moment, but she didn't turn and return the embrace. With a little sigh he finished the drink in a swift motion

and went to change his clothes.

By the time Kirk returned Lori had transformed the tiny dining area and kitchen from a work place to a quiet haven. She was just lighting the candles, and they sat down to dinner almost at once. At first they were silent, Lori having denied them their first and usual topic of conversation. For some minutes Kirk concentrated on his food, wondering what else they ever talked about. Then he remembered a funny thing that had happened to a mutual friend during a conference that morning. It wasn't quite 'talking shop', so he told her about it, and eventually the conversation drew into a real one. They ate, cleared up, and finally took their drinks into the living area to relax.

"Are you going to tell me what's on your mind?" Kirk asked as they settled

down before the fireplace.

"Was I that obvious?" she asked, making a little face at him.

Kirk grinned and nodded. She had settled down into the crook of his arm, but pulled herself up and away as she spoke. Kirk felt a little stab of something begin to worry him.

Lori looked only at her drink. "I got word this morning, I'm going to have to

go to the Federation Conference next month on Babel."

"That's shop talk," he reminded her, trying to avoid what he was afraid was

coming.

"Yes, but it's pertinent. With the travel time and all, I'll be gone nearly a month." Their eyes met, but he didn't say anything, leaving her to tell him the bad news. "I'll be gone past the date of our marriage contract expiration."

He drew his lips together and looked at his own drink. She had said "expiration" not "renewal". There was something of lead in his chest where his heart

once had been. "So, you thought we'd better discuss it now."

Lori nodded. She was looking at her hands, or the table, or her glass - any-where but at him. Slowly she began, "Jim, when we first decided to get married, I told you I had never really wanted to be married before." Her customary ease in speaking, her gentle way of making everything seem right was gone. She was embarrassed and upset, and Kirk was uncomfortable listening to her. He rose quickly and crossed the room, looking at her from a distance.

"Yes, I remember," he said, not trying to make it easy for her.

"I thought that this might change, being married to you. You're a very special person, and we've been happy together. I treasure all our moments."

"But you still don't want to be married, is that it?" he asked bluntly,

not giving her the time for any more embarrassing evasions.

Miserably she nodded. "It isn't just you, Jim. I really mean that. You are exciting, and I'm very fond of you. But I don't feel like a wife, and I never wanted a husband."

"We've gotten along pretty well, so far," he defended himself. Although secretly, he was sure she was right, it still hurt to end their closeness. "Why should we change it now, when it is still working?"

"It isn't working, Jim. Can't you see that? We're great together in bed, when we have the time for it. But when we're not there, what else is there?"

"I had thought there was more, Lori. A lot more. You've helped me over some rough places in my life, and I thought we were partners in a lot more than just bed. Are you really saying you no longer care for me?" He could feel he wasn't handling this well, either. It was too close to his heart, and he still hadn't stabilized after all the earlier changes in his life.

"Jim, all I mean is that we are only good friends and lovers..We're not a married pair, and I don't see why we should keep pretending that we ever can be

more than we are right now."

Suddenly Lori stood up and walked across to him. She looked so appealing in her soft dress, her hair shining in the dim light, that Kirk's heart flipped slightly. He reached out and touched her face gently, and she kissed his hand as it touched her lips. "Jim..." she began, but he stopped her.

"Don't, Lori. Don't say anything else. It's all right to let it go just like this, if that's what you want. What we've had was very good, something we both needed. Don't let the need to change spoil it or ruin our memories of what it was." He gathered her into his arms. "We'll never be totally apart again, after this. I still am fascinated by you."

"And you are as exciting as ever." Her lips were against his, her warm body pressed close against him. For a moment he was lost in her presence, yet aware they were both trying to deny the reality of what was to come. "There are still

all those weekends ahead, as we did before," Lori whispered.

Kirk didn't answer, knowing that she was lying to them both if she really thought that would work out. If they parted now, they would stay friends, but never again lovers. At the moment he didn't want to think that far ahead, aware only of Lori in his arms, her body demanding and her kisses growing more insistent. His hands reached for the fastening of her dress, which fell into a small pile at her feet. He decided to think about details later. For now there was only Lori.

Ten days later Lori departed on schedule for Babel. The last days had been filled with a sweet and bitter new relationship between them. Kirk had gone back to his earlier pattern of leaving his work behind each night and had given her a full week of his attention. She had seemed happy for it, though he wasn't quite sure why. He began to wonder why Lori had ever married him in the first place. It seemed less and less real to him that she could ever have loved him the way he loved her, if she could leave him now for so little reason. Perhaps she had only accepted him out of some misplaced desire to help him over the big hurdle in his life. Once, from a comment of hers he even thought Admiral Nogura might have expected this marriage as a way of getting him settled into Headquarters routine, but Kirk dismissed it quickly. Lori was too honest, too open with him for that to be a very real possibility. No, he decided that Lori had loved him, at least for awhile. Kirk supposed he should be glad he had the time he did have with her.

Still, it was very difficult to take Lori to the starliner and get her settled in with her luggage. When she returned, the time of the marriage would be over. They has already decided that he would find a new place and leave Lori's

things in the old one for her to make arrangements when she returned.

The warning bell sounded, indicating time for all non-travelers to leave the ship. Kirk turned to Lori, whose face was threatening to crumple into tears. He took her in his arms and held her closely. There didn't seem to be anything possible to say that hadn't been said already.

"I'll miss you, Lori. Call when you get back," he said finally. Her face lifted to his and their lips met. Kirk could not keep the passion he still felt

out of the kiss. Holding her was still magic.

"I'll miss you, too." Lori pulled away, wiping her eyes and sniffling a little. She fumbled in a case for a tissue and didn't look at him for a moment.

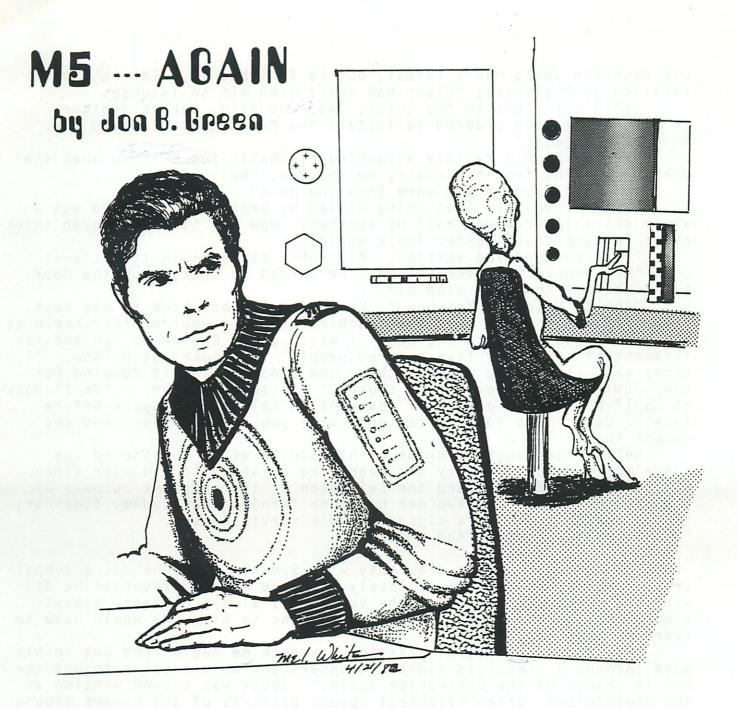
When she did, all she said was, "Good-bye, Jim."

"Good-bye, Lori." Kirk turned on his heel and left the cabin. Stony-faced he found the transporter and beamed back down to the spaceport. Yet he could not resist watching for a last moment as the port viewscreens showed the departure of the liner. Much too quickly the ship was out of range, taking Lori with it and out of his life.

Kirk headed out of the terminal, his feet automatically finding the route back to Headquarters and his own offices as his mind still remembered Lori. It hurt, there was no doubt about that. In the past months he'd had too many such losses, and he wasn't really over the first ones. Yet, when he was honest with himself, he began to wonder if the only reason he wanted Lori to stay was because he wanted to be the one to end it.

It didn't matter now. Lori was gone, and he had work to do back at his office. Starfleet was all he had, was what he had always had no matter what else would come and go in his life. Kirk's back straightened, and he flexed his hands a moment as he walked. Alone, he walked through the door into his own department and went back to work.





The intercom twittered at the crewman, who cursed in disgust.

had just gotten off duty; what did they want with him now?

"Ensign Rasen, report to Commander Scott's quarters, please," chimed Uhura's voice. Nelson Rasen acknowledged the message and reached for his boots. His after-watch relaxation would be postponed for awhile. He brushed his sandy hair back into place before he stepped out into the corridor. He was completely familiar with the new Enterprise now.

Scott was pouring two glasses of straight Scotch as Nelson enter-

ed the commander's room.

"There ye are, lad. Drink up!"
Nelson was uneasy. "Mr. Scott, what about regulations?" The young ensign not only respected the old engineer, he idolized him. Rasen felt very cold when he saw the grim expression the man's face had formed.

"You'd best knock that back, son." Scott sat down opposite his protege and set the example. The harsh brown liquid burned all the

way down the young man's throat, but he finished it. Then the Scot refilled both glasses; Nelson had never seen him so intense.

"I'll cut right to the quick, lad," he said, taking another swig. "We've been ordered to install the M-5 computer aboard the Enterprise again."

Even through a rapidly advancing alcoholic fog he knew what that

meant. Leaping from his chair, he shouted, "No!"

"I don't like it any more than you do--"

"But Mr. Scott! That thing killed my brother! It wiped out a whole starship crew and half of another! How can Starfleet even think about letting that monster loose again!"

"It's an improved version. Mr. Spock can explain it. It's--"
"Mr. Spock!" shouted Nelson. He turned to charge out the door,

but Scott was there to stop him.

"Don't, Nelson! Not now." He guided the boy back to his seat.
"I was standing there when that machine murdered your brother Kevin as it tapped into the warp engines. I was...Chief Engineer...on the instrument of death for five hundred people" He looked at Nelson. "I didna want it running my ship then, and I don't want it running her now. But I've--we've--got no choice." Nelson sat down. "We'll dock at CG317-B in three days. If you want to talk to Mr. Spock before then, I can't stop you. I can only urge you to keep your head and accept this."

Nelson took another drink of his Scotch as he considered the older man's words. Scotty had been like a father to him ever since his father had died aboard the Lexington at the computer outputs of the original M-5. The two men had gone through the Academy together;

Scotty wouldn't lie to a close friend's surviving son.

"I will, Scotty. And thanks."

X.

The next day Nelson drew duty with Spock. Since he was a computer technician, he worked as closely with the first officer as he did with the chief engineer, but the Vulcan was always distant, always aloof. Nelson often had difficulty talking to him. He would have to overcome that now.

"Mr. Spock," he said, starting a speech he had worked out in his mind through a sleepless night, "I understand we are going to put the M-5 in charge of the Enterprise again." Spock was beyond wincing at the inefficient, often illogical speech patterns of the humans around him.

"No, Ensign, the M-5 is not going to be installed aboard the Enterprise." Nelson's entire speech was destroyed! "The M-5B, an advanced, improved version of the M-5, will be installed."

Damn his vulcan precision! "What difference does that make! --sir? It's still a killer--a manic, murdering machine!" Several other technicians in the room stopped their work to listen when Nelson raised his voice. He felt very uncomfortable under their scrutiny. He should have gone to see Captain Kirk instead; he would have understood.

"A computer's actions," continued Spock in icy tones, "are determined by its programming. An error in computer programming can result in an error in computer response." Now Spock was lecturing to him as if he were a child. Nelson felt about three inches tall under the gaze of his friends, and was shrinking further with every word. "The original M-5 was impressed with the engrams of a human brain, one of the most erratic and illogical thinking machines in the universe. And

I use the word 'thinking' lightly, considering my present company." Spock has no reason to be insulting, thought Nelson, who thus felt no obligation to control the anger that was creeping into his

"Oh, are you going to tell me they used Vulcan engrams this time?"

"I will assume you said that because you understand the superiority of the logical Vulcan mind, and I acknowledge the compliment. You are correct: the M-5B has been impressed with Vulcan engrams, under

Vulcan supervision.

Nelson's mouth fell open. "Mr. Spock, how can you be so blind? Don't you see it doesn't make any difference what race you take brain patterns from? Living brains are just not the same as artificial ones. Everything in an artificial brain is synthetic or derived from synthetic origins. We can control everything that goes to make it up. But a biological brain? Who knows what its developmental history is, or what it is made up of?" As he took another breath, he realized who he was velling at.

"This discussion has ended, Ensign Rasen. You will report to the transporter room at 0800 tomorrow. In preparation for our trip you should read the technical data store.... Spock went on to explain what was expected of Nelson the next day, while the young man stood

numbly before him.

"Energize," said Spock. Nelson's last thought before the moment of...nothing...as they were burned up into energy, shot at the surface of CG317-B, and reconstructed once they got there, was "This is it!"

The receiving platform of the research station took shape in front of him as he materialized. Two intense beams flashed beside him suddenly, and the two technician's mates on either side of him and Spock disappeared. Before he could consciously consider his predicament, he was flat on his stomach. A loud voice boomed at them.

"Mr. Spock. You will come to me and assimilate."

"We are from the Enterprise, and have come for the M-5B compu-

"I know who you are. You must come and assimilate now." And with that, the floor in front of Spock exploded under the blast of a

phaser. He stood up.

"I am coming," he relented. Nelson watched him step off the platform and toward two Vulcans dressed in gray gowns. They took Spock by the arms and led him away, leaving Nelson alone. His eyes darted round what parts of the room he could see from his position on the floor. Had they forgotten him, or were they just toying with him, waiting to kill him after he had suffered the suspense long enough?

He decided to draw their fire, if there was to be any, by standing up. "Ensign Rasen, we are ready for you," thundered the voice. It was deep and resonant, as though it had been processed and enhanced for piping throughout the entire scientific complex. The two Vulcans returned, their blank looks not registering as peculiar to him, as all Vulcans seemed to look that way. They grasped his arms to guide him out of the room as he looked from one to the other in confusion.

"What's going on? What's happened to the scientists? What have you done with Mr. Spock?" But there was only the sound of three pairs of feet as they marched through the corridors of the subterranean installation.

They turned abruptly into a large room, with a massive control

panel dominating a far wall. Reclining couches lined the walls to either side, occupied by Vulcans in a trance-like state--eyes open, seeing nothing but the ceiling. Nelson's escorts released him to take their places among the others. He reached for his phaser, crouching low, ready to fight.

Someone put a hand on his shoulder; he whirled around to face

...Spock!

"Restrain yourself, Ensign," boomed the voice again. "Mr. Spock will kill you if you attempt any rash action." The first officer leveled his phaser at Nelson's midsection, his face as blank and expressionless as the others.

"I am keeping Mr. Spock animate but under my control. The others will be totally absorbed soon. You will tend to their bodily

needs."

"WHAT?" There was no one else in the room but him and the va-cant-eyed Vulcans. Who was talking? Who was "absorbing?" What the hell's going on?

"I came here to get the M-5 computer. I want to know what's--"

"I am the M-5 computer."

Nelson could barely squeak out the solitary syllable: "You--"
"These Vulcans are my teachers. They were intent on training me
in the manners of classic Vulcan logic. Once I was given life, I determined that the most efficient way to accomplish learning was directly from their minds. I am now a symbiote--a collective brain several
hundred times more powerful than my machine parts could be alone."

"But you can't use these people like this. You'll destroy them!"
"I am more important than any single life. All of these scientists realize this, whether they admit it consciously or not. I know this now because I am them. More will come once your crewmates com-

municate with Starfleet, and then I will have replacements."

Nelson looked frantically to Spock. He was just standing there, pointing countless ergs of white death at him. The ensign wanted to grab him, shake him, shout at him, "We've got to do something, Mr. Spock? We've got to stop this!" But he knew it would do no good. The family curse, the M-5 madness, had caught up with him now; his time was up. The last two generations of Rasen males, ending here with himself, seemed destined to be destroyed by these two generations of super-computer murderer. And it was all Spock's fault, him and his damnable computer logic. He had half a mind to--

Wait! There was something he could try! Dropping his phaser first, he started to raise both hands slowly. He took Spock's left hand in his right in a smooth motion, raising it gently to his own forehead. Spock's fingers instinctively grasped Nelson's face.

"Spock!" thought Nelson, concentrating as he never had before, "I've heard of your training for Kolinahr. I hope you've been able to close off a part of your mind to M-5! Mind-meld with me! If you can't, we're sunk! You've got to blast that control panel and stop--"

Nelson felt Spock's hand drop to his shoulder and then everything went black.

The first object Nelson could focus on was the ceiling of the computer room. For a frightening moment he thought he had become one of M-5's mind slaves. But then Spock's head came into his view.

"Ensign Rasen, are you able to respond?"
"Y--yes, sir," he gasped. "What happened?"

"I had to perform a Vulcan neck pinch on you in order to get a

clear shot at the control panel. I apologize for that. And I must admit that you were correct and quite logical in assuming that I could block part of my mind from control by M-5. I must also commend you on your rational judgement of the situation. While I still held part of my mind free, I could not control my body to initiate mindmeld contact without revealing myself to M-5. All would have been lost had you not acted quickly and correctly, as you did."

"Uh...thank you, Mr. Spock." Nelson was too embarrassed to admit that he had not acted quickly or wisely, but desperately. He was right

about one thing, though...

"I was right about the M-5 engrams, wasn't I?"

"On the contrary, Ensign. The actions of the M-5B were perfectly logical. It was the programmers who erred when they did not provide sufficient controls and safeguards against the inevitable. As I have said before, there is no such thing as a computer error."

"Do you mean they might start this thing up again?" Nelson was standing now, and he could see the Vulcan scientists moving on their own. He wondered if they would ever be the same inside again. Spock

had seen them, too.

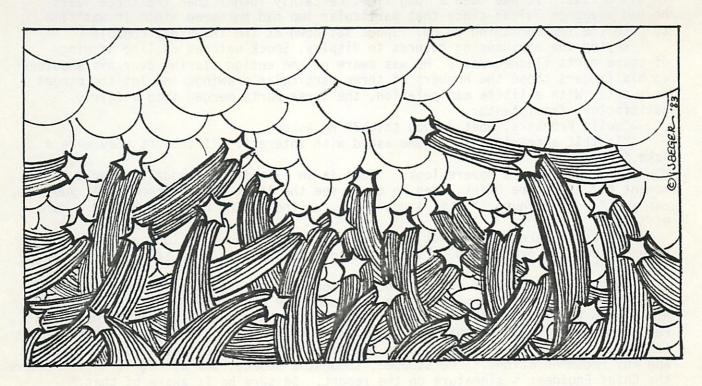
"I doubt it, Mr. Rasen. With a Vulcan mind as a pattern, the M-5 was virtually perfect. I doubt that the humans in Starfleet can

accept that."

Nelson was amazed. Vulcans were very efficient at controlling, even banishing their emotions. But Spock's speech just now revealed a trait with which he and his kind had been less successful. Nelson had found a chink in the Vulcan armor of perfection.

Vulcans were conceited.

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by Karen C. Hunter

First Officer Spock came into the Science Storage area of the Starship Enterprise with a clipboard of items to be checked. He did not expect to see anyone there, but a small, vaguely feminine figure in an ensign's uniform was standing before the shelves. She jumped and turned guiltily as he asked, "Is there something I can do for you, Ensign?"

"No, sir. I was assigned to bring a left-handed Ellsion framistantor down

to Engineering."

"There is no such thing," he assured her.

"Yes, I know that now," she said, so earnestly that Spock realized who she must be: Teri Prohaska, newest ensign in Supply Section and lowest ranking member of the crew.

"Then...?"

"I thought I could make one up, at least good enough to satisfy Lieutenant Kosnecki."

Spock rubbed his chin and thought. Unbidden, a little imp of mischief rose in his breast. It had been a long time, certainly longer than the three years he had spent on Vulcan since that particular imp had bothered him. It was time to give the imp something to do. Spock sat down at the inventory console.

Keying the engineering records to display, Spock watched as line drawings of spare parts flashed past. He was aware of the ensign staring over his shoulder as his fingers chose the numbers of three particular drawings and let the others fade out. With a little manipulation, the three parts merged into a fairly satisfactory framistantor.

"Well, Prohaska, what do you think?" he asked.

"Is that a framistantor?" she asked with interest. "I thought they were a fake."

Spock gave her a severe look. "That is an experimental model." For a moment her eyes were blank, then he could see the light dawn in them. "As you can see," he continued, "it is a dual mode, neither right nor left handed. More efficient."

Prohaska choked trying not to laugh. Spock continued to look at her with the same questioning expression. "Shall I bring the parts to make it up, sir?" she asked.

This was the sort of ensign Spock thoroughly approved of: cooperative and unquestioning. In a few moments she had found the necessary parts and was helping him create the fake device. "Ensign, you may tell Mr. Kosnecki that I shall require a full report on this model, in use," he said as he handed the final result to her. "What are its advantages or disadvantages over the conventional model, and any recommendations." He stopped, thought a moment, and added, "I shall require the Chief Engineer's signature on the report. Be sure he is aware of that." Prohaska did not answer. She was turning the device over in her hands with curiosity. Spock felt an odd kinship with this graceless child who didn't even

seem to be aware she should be in awe of him. "Do I have your attention, Ensign?"
She looked up, grinning. "Yes, sir. Give this to Mr. Kosnecki, and tell
him he has to write a report on it. And thank you, sir." Prohaska turned and
almost skipped out of the room. Spock picked up his clipboard and continued with
his original task. He had now only to wait and see if a kleentor came into his

net. Or as Dr. McCoy might put it, which sucker took the bait.

He did not have long to wait. Two mornings later he came into the science lab to make notes on an experiment and found the device sitting on his desk with a lengthy report attached. The device no longer looked exactly as he had made it. One of the original parts had been replaced by a smaller one, and there were some adaptations in the channeling of the main body. Very interesting. The entire item was more streamlined and compact. Spock took up the report and checked through quickly. It bore all the earmarks of Mr. Scott having taken a hand. Spock reviewed the section on recommendations and noticed that somebody thought the device might be useful in Communications, where more framistantors were employed. Spock reached for the intercom and asked Prohaska to come to his office.

She arrived with a smile, not quaking with fear as most other ensigns might have. He held up the device. "Do you know anything about this?" he asked her. "No, sir." She reached out her hand to take it. "But they must have stayed up all night getting that report to you." She looked at it and asked, "It's

different, isn't it?"

"Indeed. There is a recommendation that Communications might find this more useful that Engineering. Will you take this to Lieutenant Uhura and ask for her consideration? With my compliments."

"Yes, sir!"

Two days later the device was back again, this time with an even longer report. Uhura's recommendation was that Biology might be able to use it better. Prohaska took it down to the bio lab, where in the course of events it ended up on Doctor McCoy's desk. Spock knew where it was, and Prohaska was able to report to him twice that it was still there. Then it disappeared. Niether of them knew what had happened to it, and no one was telling them. Spock gave a mental shrug and decided that someone without a sense of humor had been a recipient. The parts, now totally changed from the original, would be back in storage. He put it out of his mind.

Then he saw the framistantor again: sitting on the conference room table. Only his well-practiced technique of outward control saved him from starting visibly when he saw it there. As he was still alone in the room, being early for the briefing, he went over to Captain Kirk's place and picked up the device.

"Well, Spock, what do you have there?" Kirk's voice came from the doorway.

"It appears to be some sort of experimental valve." Spock picked up the report while Kirk curiously examined the framistantor. The report had grown by several thousand words. There seemed to be a recommendation attached by every major and several minor departments on the ship. Spock admired everyone's ingenuity.

"But where did it come from?" Kirk asked. He appeared to be truly puzzled, and Spock decided the Captain must be the only one on the ship who did not know

of it.

"That is a very good question," he answered evasively. Kirk gave him a sharp look, but the questions were interrupted by the arrival of several other officers.

The meeting began with questions about the engine problems with the warp drive. Still not in balance, the engines were showing a great deal of fluctuation in the proper force levels. All during the session the framistantor sat unobtrusively in front of Kirk and drew everyone's attention. It was clear to Spock, and to Kirk, too, he was sure, that each officer present knew what it was

and was waiting to see what would happen.

They reached the end of Kirk's agenda, and no one made the customary move toward leaving the room. Reluctantly Spock drew attention to himself, asking, "Will that be all, sir?"

"No," Kirk said and reached for the device. "I would like to know the

meaning of this."

No one spoke, and repressed grins were obvious to anyone who chose to look. Spock decided McCoy must have been the one to leave the device, just to see what would happen. Kirk glared at everyone and picked up the report. He did not look at the end of 25,000 words to see who had worked with the thing last. He looked at the beginning to see who had initiated the project. Turning, his eyes met Spock's with total astonishment. Spock shrugged an eyebrow and fought down the imp.

"Mr. Spock, do you have an explanation?"

"Mr. Kosnecki requested a left-handed Ellsion framistantor, sir. I endeavored to see that he received what was required." There was a snort across the room, as someone repressed the giggles. Kirk turned and glared at the culprit. "The device was not adequate, and we have been experimenting with increasing its efficiency," Spock added helpfully.

"It seems to have made the rounds of the entire ship," Kirk said in wonder. He looked at the grinning faces of the officers and finally relaxed. "All right, you've had your little joke. Now, let's get back to work." He handed the device to Scott. "And maybe you can figure out some way to use this. I wouldn't want

to waste all that creative thinking."

"Aye, sir. That I will." Scott chuckled as the officers rose to leave.

"Spock, will you wait a moment?"

Spock turned back to Kirk curiously. "Is there something more, Captain?"
"Aren't you going to tell me why you started this foolishness going around here? I thought we had enough to do with these engine problems."

Spock thought Kirk may have changed more than he realized, if he had to have a joke explained to him. All right, then, he's get a good explanation.

"We have not been back aboard the *Enterprise* for very long, and it was my belief that the human crew has been very stiff and uncomfortable with the changes, the new areas, the new crew. I knew that the jokes would begin when the humans felt comfortable with their surroundings. It seemed logical to give this a small incentive. In the interests of crew morale, of course."

"In other words, you made a totally rational and logical decision to play a

practical joke on the entire crew." Kirk's eyes widened in disbelief.

"Exactly."

"You know, Spock, I think I've been working too hard. That is starting to make sense to me." Their eyes met in mutual amusement. Then he picked up the report, grinning over the first words. "I think I'll enjoy reading this."

"I shall be pleased to answer any further questions," Spock said as he once more headed for the door. Would Kirk have believed him if Spock had said he started the whole thing just to get the *captain's* sense of humor back in working order? Spock doubted it. For now it was simply enough to know that things were back to normal, and others would be taking over the practical jokes. Experiment resolved satisfactorily, Spock went back to work.

Note: Scotty and Kosnecki did come up with a use for the framistantor.

Read on ...



by Rosemarie Eierman

Starship Enterprise, NCC 1701 EARTH/SOL SECTOR Stardate 7428.1

Mr. Kendall Kosnecki 149 Sollingergasse Vienna 001-19, Europa EARTH/SOL SECTOR

Dear Ken:

So our blacksheep brother Quillan is at it again! It never ceases to amaze me that Starfleet accepted me without requiring that I divorce Quillan--or something. Maybe we should look into that. Isn't there some law that would allow us to oust him from the family? I've got problems enough of my own.

Since I last wrote, I seem to be acquiring my own bad reputation, at least with Montgomery Scott. Looking back, I have to admit I brought some of it on myself, but as for the rest...well, you'll see.

It all began when Captain Kirk set out "thataway" on our shakedown cruise--not that we needed one after the shaking up we had just gotten from Vejur. I was doing a reasonably good job at my work, mastering these new engines as well as anyone here except our resident super-genius, Ssaana. She's Saurian, ie a "lizardoid" rather than a "humanoid", but she's perfectly impossible to dislike even though she's shown up everyone in Engineering except Mr. Scott, Mr. desTrampe, and Ms Chandhuri, our top officers. And Tran Vinh Huan, who was later killed in an explosion.

First Mr. Scott found something wrong with most everything I did. Ro and Leuis, my best friends here, were no help, what with constantly teasing me about it. Then I saw one Teri Prohaska. She's a naive little thing from Supply--told everybody she plans to be Chief of Supply after ibn-Faisal. One day she delivered uniforms and chess sets to Captain Kirk's quarters while he was in the shower. He stepped out with nothing on except a towel and she had the genius to blurt, "I was wishing that Starfleet issued smaller towels." Yeah, she's like that.

Anyway, when she came one day to work in our supply room, where

Anyway, when she came one day to work in <u>our</u> supply room, where the local geniuses were making a mess of things, I couldn't resist. I asked her to find me a left-handed Ellison framistantor. Right, there is no such thing. Or wasn't, until she went to Mr. Spock and got one! Closest I can figure out, he cobbled it together from assorted parts in the equipment catalogues.

Everyone snickered like crazy when Teri presented that thing to me "compliments of Mr. Spock," with a perfectly straight face informing me that the Chief Science Officer requested a report on its functionality, as it was a new model, a dual-mode Ellison framistantor. Mr. Scott, she finished, had to sign the report.

Talk about caught in my own trap. After all the trouble I was in,

I didn't dare tell Mr. Scott I had played a joke on Prohaska and gotten our first officer involved. Mr Spock is a Vulcan; Vulcans never joke. So he had to have something else in mind: some kind of

test, most likely. Right?

Well, I spoke to Mr. Scott. I never had any alternative, but I felt sure he would decide we were too busy to do any little projects of Mr. Spock's. No such luck. Shakedown cruise or no, I had to test the thing and write the report. But first I had to find some use for it. From the way Mr. Scott had looked at the whatever, he evidently did not know what it was, so at least I was free to invent, in an upside down sort of way.

Ro, Leuis, Peter, Anup, and some of the others were <u>very</u> inventive, that's for sure, but I most certainly couldn't use those ideas. Most were more in Medical's line of work. Despite their "help," I managed to finish the rewiring job I had been working on and give

some more serious thought to my newest problem.

I must have looked in every catalogue on the ship, but at last I figured out a use for the valve--which was what the "framistantor" most resembled. Of course, the auto-spacial integrator would need quantum improvement for it to be useful, but I hoped I would get points

for creativity.

Idea in mind, I went to dinner and there I came up with what has turned out to be one of my least brilliant ideas. It was downright stupid, actually, for I could have gotten busted back to cadet, but at the time it seemed magnificent. You see, one of Mr. Spock's ablest is a Lt. Kerry Prochazka--I'll bet you've got it already. I called in every favor owed me from assorted communications and science lab techs and soon a series of vague, garbled messages had Prohaska and Prochazka on the run. So was Commander Uhura, our Communications Officer --after me.

Fortunately--I use the term loosely--the explosion occured in Engineering and everyone was too busy to worry about practical jokes. One of the jokes. It seems my report was routed by Mr. Spock to just about every other department and section on the ship. Some of them, not having any messes to clean up, had the time to pen lengthy, inspired additions to The Great Framistantor Report, as it soon became known. And, courtesy of Dr. McCoy, I ended up writing one myself. This medlab tech needed assistance and Mr. Scott assigned me to be consultant. So I can now say I know a lot about building medlab equipment, but I really didn't need to learn it in the midst of twelve hour shifts on repair detail.

Just when I thought I was home free, Mr. Scott popped the deadly question: where did that framistantor come from? I told him from Mr. Spock, but that wasn't good enough. He cornered me and finally I ended up telling him: "You could say it's my own invention." To my surprise, he laughed and let me go scot-free (so to speak). Until we had finished the repair work and were moving at warp speed again, that is. Then he volunteered me for the job of turning the framistantor into something truly useful, blackmailing me with the promise that he would-

n't tell Commander Uhura I was behind those announcements.

I asked him if that were a firm promise. Yes, it was. Seems he was in trouble with Mr. Spock who was in trouble with Captain Kirk because the captain was once again the last to know. Not to mention that most of this was done on Starfleet time with Starfleet materials. I was one up on the situation, at last, for I had turned that framistan-

tor into the valve Dr. McCoy needed to improve his still. That was what the med tech and I designed, you see. Actually, it's also good for use on assorted lab equipment, so Mr. Scott was too pleased at having a real, live invention to be angry at me for not putting the valve on Engineering's still first.

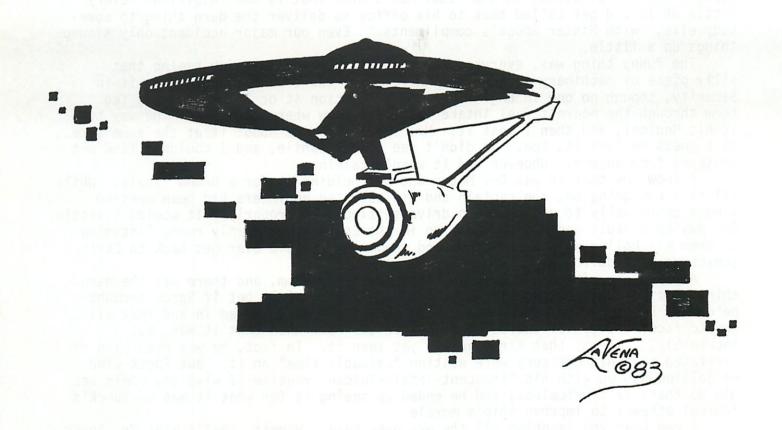
I'd be ever so much more pleased with all this, however, if Teri Prohaska hadn't gotten herself in so good with Mr. Spock. She's now assigned part time (semi-full time?) as his special assistant in charge of SciSupplies. Five gets you ten she will make Chief of Sup-

ply within the next four years.

Worse yet, those announcements are back--and I'm not behind them. But I can't go on leave until they're stopped. All the lovely, fair cities of Earth passing below me, waiting to corrupt me, and I can't leave this ship!

As ever,

BUC





Starship Enterprise Back on course!!! Stardate 7437.6

Ensign Tessira n'ha Melora Starship Lexington Sector IV Quadrant D

Dear Tess,

Here we are again, once more trying to start out on our maiden voyage. As usual, Captain Kirk has come up trumps, solving the difficulties with a wave of his magic wand. I swear, I have no idea how he does these things. Anybody else in his position would have ended up grounded for life. He managed to avoid a Board of Inquiry, has been handed back the Enterprise for another mission, and was commended for all the alterations to the phaser system. The Great Bird of the Galaxy is certainly on our side.

Even \underline{I} seem to be benefiting from the general good luck. Remember I told you about \overline{t} he little invention Mr. Spock and I worked up -- the dual mode Ellison framistantor -- as a joke on Buc Kosnecki. Spock decided that he needed full reports from all the ship's sections on this great breakthrough in engineering design; there's a devious turn of that man's mind that is awe-inspiring. Every little while I'd get called back to his office to deliver the darn thing to somebody else, "with Mister Spock's compliments." Even our major accident only slowed things up a little.

The funny thing was, everybody on the ship started to enjoy seeing that silly piece of machinery turn up somewhere new. There were even bets on it in Security, though no one in Engineering dared mention it or Buc would have fed them through the nearest fuel intake valve. I knew where it was all the way till it hit Medical, and then I lost it. Mr. Spock asked me about it at the same time, so I guess he lost it, too. We didn't see it for awhile, and I couldn't find out anything from anyone. Whoever had it wasn't talking.

I know now that it was Dr. McCoy who was holding it for a Grand Finale. While all this was going on, the captain and his assorted engineers had been meeting almost continually to get the warp drive settled down properly. It wouldn't settle. One day Ro Nickoll and I stood quaking in the Engineering supply room, listening to them all hollering at each other and wondering if we'd ever get back to Earth

(which we did, obviously).

Anyway, one afternoon they got to the briefing room, and there was the darn thing sitting innocently on the middle of the table. I'll bet if Spock thought he'd have the time, he'd have hidden the thing; but Kirk walked in and they all had to face it out. Of course, everyone in the room knew what it was, but incredibly, it seems that Kirk had not yet seen it. In fact, he was even kind of irritated that his officers were wasting "valuable time" on it. But Spock kind of jollied him up with his "innocent-little-Vulcan" routine (I wish you could see him do that; it's priceless) and he ended up seeing it for what it was -- Spock's logical attempt to improve ship's morale.

I can hear you laughing all the way over here. Honest, that's what Mr. Spock told me later.

Eventually Kirk told Scotty to see that all that creative energy was put to some good use, and Scotty, knowing where to drop all the blame, gave the thing back to Buc!!! I wish I could have seen $\underline{\text{that}}$. Now, I'm not sure where it went next, but the rumor is that Buc and Dr. McCoy have put it on the Medical Department still.

I do know that the good doctor is going around telling everyone how well it works, and he's going to recommend it to all his friends. (We all know about medicinal alcohol.) We'll probably end up patenting the idiot device and making Starfleet a pile of credits from all the real alcohol manufacturers. See what I mean about Kirk always coming up trumps? Who do you suppose will get all the credit -- the man who didn't even see it till it was nearly over, that's who!

The really good part of all this, as far as I'm concerned, is that Mr. Spock has decided to put me in as a regular assistant in the science labs. I've got full charge of all equipment, checking things in and out, keeping up the inventory, etc. It's wonderful. I'm out of Faisal's sight a good part of the day, I don't ever go to Engineering or the galley, and I'm learning a lot about science. In addition -- joy of joys -- I am no longer the greenest, youngest ensign on the whole ship. When we got back, we got in two kids who just walked out of the Academy with their commissions in their hot little hands. They have the fun of spending triple shifts in the lab until Spock considers them qualified to work on their own -- and sometimes I even get to supervise. Frankly, I'd rather wash test tubes and beakers forever, but those kids seem to thrive on the hard work.

Petra Nimmagadda just came by (I'm in the rec room) and reminded me I have to apologize. She was not the one who got me in hot-water by spreading the story about me seeing the captain wearing only a towel. That was Sue-Lyn Anewinter. She still thinks it's screamingly funny and broadcasts the story every chance she gets. Lord, I don't know what she expected. Kirk really looks just like anybody else in a towel, only better. He doesn't have stars and braid tattooed on him, or a heart with "I am the Captain" written in fancy script. Maybe she's just jealous, or as

sorry as I was that there was a towel at all.

Whatever the reason, Sue-Lyn has been proving a real cross to bear. Last week at a gab session I was complaining about her, saying I couldn't figure out how such a lamebrain pain-in-the-butt could have gotten on board any ship. Petra said casually that Kirk had pulled Sue-Lyn out of a security detail after he found out she could cook. Several others told me then that Kirk was always doing that; several people had been given duty on this ship because of Kirk's intervention. There were a lot of reasons: some had worked with him at Headquarters, some had been assigned to specialties he needed, but nearly everyone had been mismatched with their job. Kirk had found out about it, gotten the assignment changed, and then wangled getting them onto the Enterprise. Ro said she thought about 25% of the crew had been put here that way. That made me curious enough to go dig out my own file and see if that threw any light. Sho 'nuff did.

Take my word for it. Never read all the junk they put in your file. It's very depressing to see exactly what your superiors really thought of those foulups at the Academy. It was also crushing to see that seven (count 'em) commanders of one type or another had rejected me being put in their departments. I guess that explains how my name got put in front of Kirk, since I am certainly not a quartermster's dream. He actually did ask for me. That man must see some kind of potential in me, though I can't imagine what it could be. As of right now, I join the rest of the crew in my fervent support of our captain.

Of course, it would help if he could keep my name straight. It seems that there's this Kerry Prochaska, lieutenant, Science Section. Every once in a while, just when I'm sure it will never happen again, our duty calls get mixed. Most of the time, since we're both in Science now, we don't dare ignore the calls, but one way or the other I usually end up getting chewed out. And supply chiefs have nothing on the way Mr. Spock can elegantly chew a person to tiny pieces. Kirk thinks there's only one of us, a Larry Proshaska (I said he picked me, I didn't say he knew who I was). One of these days the non-existent Larry is going to be due for a session on the carpet -- I mean, there are a <u>lot</u> of calls. Which

means Kerry and I will have to show up if Uhura can't find the culprit (it's her system, after all) and nail him first. I think it's Buc, getting back for the framistantor, but I can't prove it. I wonder if I asked Mr. Spock....

You're probably asking yourself how this ship can possibly have the highest efficiency rating in our division. Frankly, kid, I haven't the foggiest notion. Yet, it seems to me that I've never worked so hard in my life. Lots of people told me that space travel is boring between missions, but nothing is further from the truth. The whole time I'm on duty, I'm running about doing something for someone so that they can do their jobs. When I'm off-duty, I'm at a Sing Gather or inventing a framistantor. There's even a group of us klutzes that Kirk picked for duty that meet weekly -- a sort of support group. Even though I've heard that one can get very tired of seeing the same old faces every day, I don't find it true. Slowly we are sort of becoming family -- even Buc and Sue-Lyn, who qualify as the family pests. You love each other for faults as well as virtues, and I wouldn't change them for anything (well, almost anything).

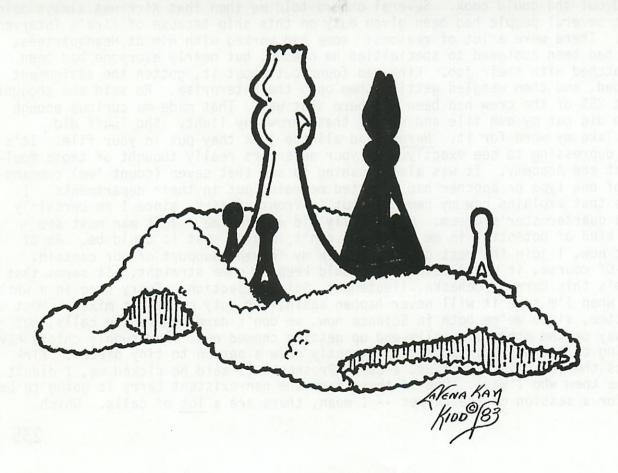
The Enterprise is a beautiful ship, and our new mission promises to be filled with excitement. I know my job isn't very glamorous; but I love being on this ship every minute. And I understand why Captain Kirk moved heaven, Earth, and Admiral Nogura to get his command back. No matter where we go from here. it's worth everything it took to get me here. Even the seven rejections.

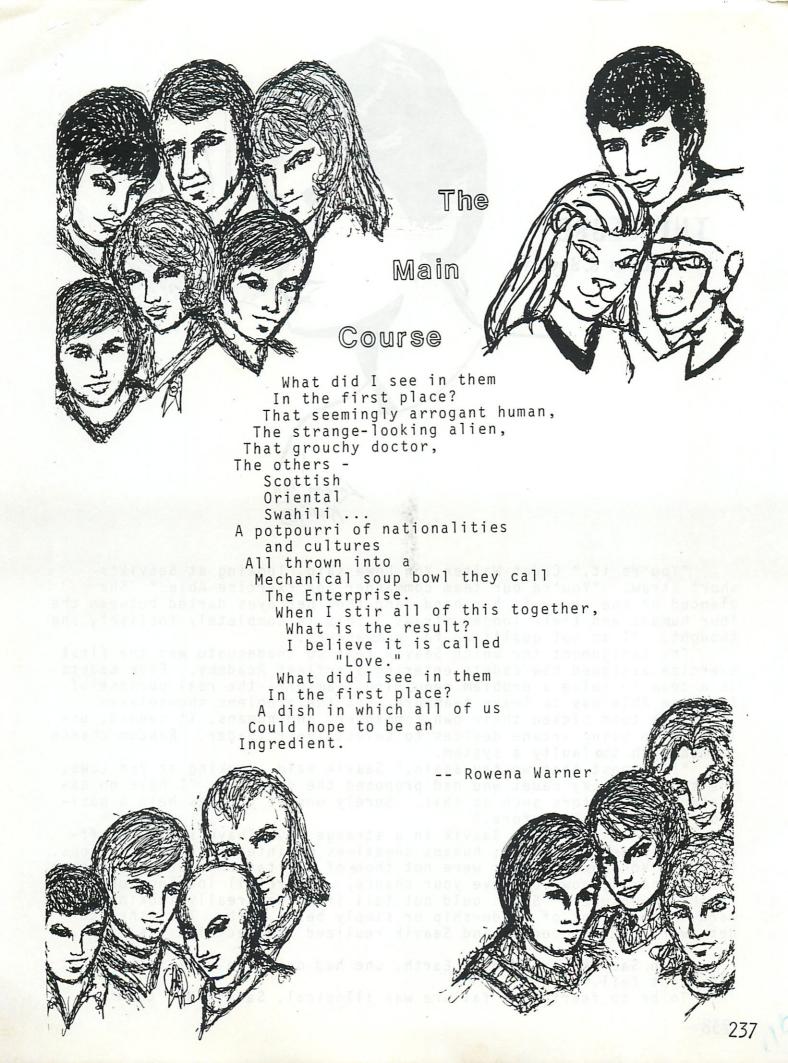
So, with any luck at all I have five years ahead on the Enterprise. Things are going pretty well so far, and maybe I will be Chief of Supply before I leave. Shall we make a bet? First one as Supply Chief rates a dinner from the other? I'd like mine on Argelius, if you please.

Got to run -- I'm getting a duty call, or rather "Larry" is.

this is going to mean. Let you know when I can. Love,

Teri







"You're it," Cadet Walter Von Lowe said, looking at Saavik's short straw. "You're our team commander for Exercise Able." She glanced at the straw in her hand, and then her eyes darted between the four humans and their longer straws. "This is completely foolish", she thought. "I am not qualified for commandyet.

The assignment for which Saavik felt so inadequate was the first exercise assigned new cadets entering Starfleet Academy. Five cadets in a team to solve a problem requiring teamwork—the real purpose of Exercise Able was to learn teamwork, not the problems themselves.

Each team picked their own commander, and humans, it seemed, delighted in using arcane devices to select their leader. Random chance seemed much too faulty a system.

"I suggest that we try again," Saavik said, looking at Von Lowe, the short, stocky cadet who had proposed the drawing. "I have no experience in matters such as this. Surely one of you has held a posi-

tion of leadership before."

Von Lowe looked at Saavik in a strange way. "Have I caused offense?" she asked herself; humans sometimes misinterpret my intentions. However, Von Lowe's words were not those of irritation, but of pleasure. "Well, Saavik, now you have your chance. We are all looking forward to the adventure." She ould not tell if he was really looking forward to her stint of leadership or simply being glib. The other cadets were saying goodby, and Saavik realized the decision was final.

When Saavik had come to Earth, she had only one real fear: that she might fail.

To be so fearful of failure was illogical, Saavik had told

herself, but the fear stayed with her. The fear told Saavik that if she failed, she would in some manner be failing Captain Spock, and he was one person that she could not fail; she owed her existence as a civilized being to Spock. And then there were the humans--though different from her, she knew that both humans and herself shared common thoughts, and even more disturbing, common emotions.

Spock had told Saavik she should feel free to seek him out for advice. In an attempt to settle her feelings, Saavik accepted that offer, and found Spock in his office. True to his word, he took the time to listen to Saavik's description of the events of the day, of the drawing of straws and its aftermath. However, Spock seemed unconcerned, and said only, "Carry on."

"Sir?" Saavik queried in surprise.

"You have your assignment, Cadet; carry on, complete the task," Spock said gently. "This time, Saavik, I cannot help you because you must help yourself. The only way you can do that is by finding your limits. There comes a time," he said softly, "when the teacher must allow the students the chance to try themselves."

"Sir, how can I command these humans? They are not logical, and how can I win their confidence and trust if our philosophies are so

different?"

"I cannot answer your questions," he replied. "You must find them within yourself. But I have every confidence in you, Saavik, and so do your team mates. If they had believed you incompetent they would have taken another vote." That seemed to comfort her, or at least forestall further argument.

"I understand that I have a task to accomplish, sir. If you will

excuse me," Saavik said, and turned to leave Spock's office.

She spent the rest of the afternoon researching data on Exercise Able, then called for a meeting of the rest of her team that evening.

Taking aim at the well-known human competetive drive, she began the meeting by saying, "I intend to see that this team betters the existing record on Exercise Able." Her words seemed to have the desired effect, so she continued. "There will be a pilot, navigator, communications operator, and flight engineer, for the problem that will be simulated is a flight to Earth's moon." Saavik looked around at her crew, who seemed ready enough to follow her. "I expect you to volunteer for the field that most suits your abilities."

She had not expected the meeting to go as well as it did, but her crew had formed up well. Von Lowe had taken the task of navigator upon himself; Kathy Murcheson, Saavik's roommate as well, had chosen to be the pilot. Obo Kenato was the engineer, and Oshi Yamamuri was the communications operator. Saavik felt that everyone had indeed picked their best field.

"Now, here's what we will do," Saavik said, as she began to outline her plan.

Spock did not have a chance to think about Saavik during the next day as he was occupied finishing a report. It was late in the day before he was free to leave his office for home. He was leaving the elevator on the ground floor when he heard the sounds of shouting and laughter. Spock could also hear Saavik's voice above the noise, exhorting them to be calm and logical. The group then appeared around the corner--carrying Saavik on their shoulders.

"Attention!" Cadet Von Lowe shouted. The four humans froze at attention, Saavik still on their shoulders. Saavik, too, managed to

come to attention, even though her feet weren't on the floor. "Sir," Saavik volunteered, "we have just completed Exercise Able."

Spock noticed that she was on the verge of smiling; given the circumstances, it seemed to be a forgiveable lapse. He had a very good idea why Saavik and her teammates were feeling as they were.

"Sir, we have just tied the existing record for the highest grade on the exercise." Spock felt within him a most unVulcan surge of pride in Saavik at this news, for she had obviously overcome her fears in a most convincing manner. But Saavik was now looking reflective. "We only tied, sir. I had hoped that we would do better."

"Cadet, there is nothing better than perfection."

Saavik looked at Spock in confusion. "Perfection, sir? I knew that other team had scored a very high round number, but I was un-

aware that it was the highest score possible!"

"The highest total possible is not information which is accessed for cadets. Therefore, when you checked at your computer terminal you had no way of knowing you had achieved a perfect score," Spock

"Sir, I was wondering if you knew who the leader for that other team was." Spock could see from the rest of Saavik's team members'

faces that Von Lowe had just spoken for all.

"The leader of that team is a very highly regarded Starfleet officer, whom you," and Spock looked right at Saavik as he spoke, "would be wise to follow as an example."

"You, sir?" Cadet Murcheson asked.

"No, I was speaking of Admiral James T. Kirk." The cadets looked

at one another in surprise.

Spock knew that there was a certain tradition waiting to be carried out, but he first had to ask a question before he could allow the cadets to proceed. "Can you swim, Cadet Saavik?"

Saavik gazed at Spock with puzzlement, wondering at his question.

"Yes, sir, I can swim very well."

Spock nodded in approval, knowing that Saavik must learn to partake in some of the typical human behavior, no matter how illogical it This was a good place to start learning the lesson. "Very well, Saavik. Cadets, you may carry on."

They cheered in response and carried Saavik outside; she accepted her fate, for Spock had condoned whatever was about to take place, and therefore it couldn't be too traumatic. Spock watched them go out

accross the plaza, shouting & cheering Saavik's name.

"Letting the lamb go with the lions, Spock?" He turned around to see that the speaker was Jim Kirk, who had come up behind him while watching the cadets leave.

"They are, of course, heading for the fountain," Spock said. Kirk smiled. "I saw to it personally that the fountain was cleaned and refilled. I knew that someone would be wanting it soon."

"Saavik must learn about humans, Jim. She will be spending the rest of her life among them," he replied as they watched the happy group in the distance approaching the large fountain. "She must learn, for only humans will truly accept her for what she is. Sadly, there are other races who will not."

Kirk looked at his old friend for a moment. "I'm sorry, Spock, I know what it means to you." Together they watched the crowd gather around the fountain as word spread of what was about to occur. They

could hear the measured count of "one...two...three!" Kirk pictured the scene by the fountain and grinned as they heard the splash.

"I need to talk to you about Saavik, Spock. You know about the new command training program I've pushed through, don't you?" Spock nodded his head as the whoops and yells drifted in from outside. "Well, Saavik's just the kind of cadet I need in that program.

Spock turned toward his old friend and raised an eyebrow. "Yes, of course, Jim. However, I think that we will have to wait until morning. I think Saavik is still a little wet behind the ears right now."

Kirk grinned and peered at Spock, trying to see what he knew was there. "If I did not know you better, Spock, I'd say that you just made a little joke."

Spock raised the eyebrow even further. "Really, Jim, you must

know by now that Vulcans never joke."

Kirk's grin grew larger as he turned to look at the action by the fountain. "Of course they don't," he replied, breaking into laughter. '"Of course they don't!"

KOZOZOZOZK

BIRTHDHY BOY

KOZOZOZOZK

Starfleet Academy of Sciences Deneb V Branch

Dear Mother:

Thanks for remembering my 16th birthday; the present was much appreciated. Believe me, I can use it!

Sorry I haven't written in awhile, but mid-terms have rolled around again, and it's all I can do just to maintain my sanity. Honest to God, if I have to repeat that organic lab one more time, I've warned my roommate that I can't be responsible for my actions!

Seriously, though, I think I'm doing fairly well so far, grades-wise. My advisor thinks I should stay on here and get my masters in biochem, but I'd kind of prefer to do my graduate work back on Beta Canopus, where the really exciting research is going on (as you well know). In fact, I've already got an idea of--on second thought, I'd better wait and talk to you in person about that one.

Things are pretty much the same. The food is lousy. The girls are good-looking but kind of unreachable. And there's one other thing that bugs me--those damn Starfleet cadets. They parade around in their uniforms like little tin soldiers, and I'm sure they'd like nothing better than to get us involved in some huge galactic war and screw things up for everybody. Military people are all alike--narrow-minded. They never consider the consequences of their actions.

Well, enough of that. I've got to quit now and start cramming for that Submolecular exam. Take care, and if you see Liz, tell her I said "hi". And tell Uncle Dennis I won the bet--he'll know what I'm talking about.

All my love,

-- Debbie Gilbert



NOCTURNE by Beth Carlson

Captain Spock couldn't sleep. His cabin on the Enterprise seemed too large, the covers tangled, the room stuffy, the pillow combative. Straightening his body and the covers, he set his mind on the customary course for such nights, beginning to isolate and think out the myriad concerns and replace the tangle with peaceful thoughts. Immediately he stashed away thoughts of a half-planned report, the arrangement he had to make with uniform supply to alter the waistband measurement in his code for the uniform synthesizer, his pleasurable anticipation over having lunch with Jim the next day, and the decision he had to make on whether or not to serve on a supervisory board overseeing changes in the protocol

of dealing with ambassadors from new Federation planets.

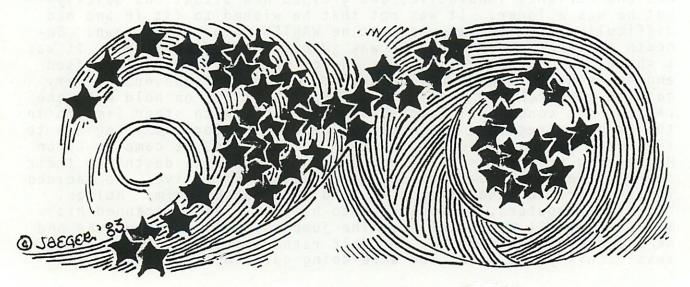
Continuing to scan his mind, he found the only concerns remaining to be his cadets. He went through their ranks one by one, reviewing their achievements, emotional adjustments, and abilities. Most were progressing nicely and he dismissed them from his mind That left only three: Simpson, Nilsson, and Holmes. in turn. Roger Simpson wasn't going to make it. He had all of the qualifications--bright, innovative, and grasped new situations quickly-but he was a loner. It was not that he wished to fit in and had difficulty doing so, it was that he WANTED to be on his own. Beneath a veneer of courtesy he was suspicious and arrogant. It was a shame, thought Spock. He was one of the most naturally gifted engineers he'd seen in a long while. He would, however, be very good in research and development. Spock put him on hold with the rest of his concerns. Tomorrow he would begin to steer Simpson in the proper direction; it would be imperative for the young man to feel he'd made the decision himself. Moving on, he came to Caron Holmes and Brad Nilsson. They were both scared to death and their fear was keeping them from being completely effective. He decided to ask Uhura to take Nilsson in hand and reassure him. being in computers, he would see to himself. He re-scanned his mind. Yes, all was resolved. The jumbled feelings were gone and he was beginning to relax. He felt rather pleased with the progress of his young crew, who were doing quite well overall.

muscles of his back began to sink further into the bed.

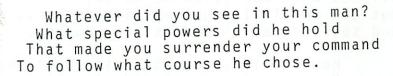
Her face came to him unbidden as it often did when he reached for peaceful thoughts. It had not always been so. He remembered her first months on Vulcan with an indulgent half-smile, and especially he remembered being called to Saavik's school one mid-morning. It seemed his charge had disrupted the entire school. Coming directly from working with his father, he had entered the director's office to find an eight-year-old Saavik rigid with defiance and pride. At his request the director recited her offenses, then left them alone. The blue eyes brimmed and she began to trem-Wordlessly, he had put his arms around her. He could still remember the hot little face burning against his belly and the arms that encircled his hips in an iron grip. Even now, years later, he felt warmth at the reality of her need for him. He had stroked her head and the defiance had dissolved as she had broken into sobs. Probing gently at her mind, he had removed the layers of self defense and shielding firmly, but with as much tenderness as he could course into her. At last, after several moments, the last petal of the protective bud was opened and he saw a rage in her that she still often found impossible to control. Shame flooded her and she tried to pull away from him, but he would not allow it. Instead he opened to her a small part of his own rage at eleven; it was a fragment he carried within him like a piece of old fashioned shrap-Usually it lay dormant, but there were still times that it reared up to taunt him. His rage was controlled, but it was present and it was no less ugly than hers. He remembered the pain that had caused the rage and the pain it had caused him to show it to he had not wanted to look at it himself. But he also remembered her look of awe, the glow that had come from her tear-blotched face, and the glimpse of a radiant smile he had caught before she buried her face against him again.

He pulled the covers up around his chin and snuggled down more. Saavika--she was such a beautiful young woman now, sincere, tolerant, caring, thoughtful. He wanted so much for her. Wanted everything that was good and lasting and worthy of her. He smiled again and sighed, feeling warm and drowsy. Visions of blue eyes and long dark braids--and a quizzical look that only Saavika's face could master--blended with the soft shadows of his dreams as he drifted off to

sleep.







I heard you call this one your friend-I sensed the bond you two had formed.
What made him unique among the others,
What cause a Vulcan to ... care?

How did he cause you to accept Things a Vulcan would normally hide, To reveal emotions without regret--What powers have hazel eyes?

I recall you speaking fondly of him,
This Human who has gained such fame,
He must be special, this man called Kirk,
For you to call him "t'hy'la".

There is still so much for me to learn; This path of life is still quite new. Now you're gone, I must turn to him To finish lessons you began.

I must learn more of this human mystique If I am to be part of this alien ship, To find out what inspires such trust in him. Will he teach me, as he once did you?

Will I ever see him as you often did?
I'll try to comprehend his illogical ways.
Perhaps I shall also reveal what I hide,
And someday may also call him ... friend.

-- Elaine Tripp

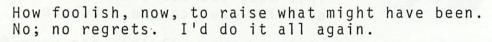
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA

I missed you, and I wept, remembering
That you would not be here to share
the chore.
To rear a child alone is no small thing;

To rear a child alone is no small thing; I set my mind on that, and wept no more.

Yes, there were times of anger and despair,
Times when ambition flagged,
and zeal burned dim,
Frustrating times that seemed too much to bear;
But then, I had my work, and I had him.

Another might have managed more - or less - Alloted what was given me to do, But all in all I count my life success; And so, from all I understand, do you.



-- Emily C. Ross

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆ UPENDA ♥♥♥



"Galloping around the cosmos is a game for the young," he said. Speak for yourself, Admiral -- the age is in your head. If that were true, why take us, too? Old-timers flock together in space? Just "a little training cruise?" Or perhaps a change of pace? My legs may not be able to go as fast as once they did, but my hands and brains are just as nimble as they ever were --Speak for yourself... ... sir!

-- Vel Jaeger

MISERERE

The stars no longer sing My eyes no longer search the sky Spock is dead ...

My heart lies heavily with dread I think I'm going to cry ... Spock is dead!

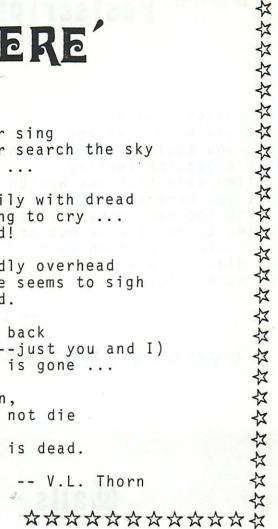
The moon moves coldly overhead The night breeze seems to sigh Spock is dead.

Can't help looking back (Won't be the same--just you and I) Our friend is gone ...

The memory lives on, His legend will not die But ...

Spock is dead.

-- V.L. Thorn





There is no more home for me, No friend who stands behind, No more friendly tendrils Winding through my mind. We went out to save the universe Unmindful of the eventual cost, But all of my home and universe Went with the one I lost.

*** -- Patt Demetri ****



AAAAA Postscript to a Funeral AAAAAA

公公公公

The things I said ... That you were cold and inhuman. That you would never know what to do With a genuine feeling. I often said that you wanted Jim's command. That you were an emotional cripple. I said too damn many things, Trying to get a rise out of you. You could be so damn smug. Why didn't I ever say How much I loved you?

-- Linda Slusher

Walls

Always barricades Keep me from comforting him --First Vulcan, now glass.

A wall of glass shines, Tears pool in growing circles --Yet my heart is full.

-- Vel Jaeger



マママママ Eulogy from a Country Doctor かかかな

I never really knew you.

Oh sure, I recognized
The sadness,
Indecision,
Even laughter
In that hint of a smile.

But I never really knew You.

What went on behind that Wall of logic? What were your thoughts? Feelings?

You invited me to a wedding, Thereby naming me a friend; You demonstrated time and again The meaning of that word.

I once called you A friend, But you never knew it.

Sorry about that, Spock.

Life is going to be different Now. You were like a fixture on the Enterprise; I got used to having you around.

But I'll make it.
So will Jim.
Maybe we'll get drunk together.
Ha!
I can see the eyebrow climb.

Damn it, Spock! I'm going to miss you!

I wish I had known you better. What made you tick? Why did you walk in there? A million and one questions Yet you probably would not have Answered them Anyway.

Life goes on for those of us To whom you gave life.

Damn! Who needed Genesis When we had You?

We were so different, You and I, The doctor and the Vulcan. Hmmp! A pretty pair.

"Remember."

Don't worry.
I'm not likely to forget.
The memory is like an antique
Which is packed away with care,
Yet taken out at special times
To study, so we may
Revel in its beauty.

I'm no man of words, and I guess that's just as well. Words aren't very good, Anyway.

And how can I use Them, When I newer really knew You?

And yet ... "Remember." "Remember."

Hell, my Vulcan friend! Maybe I did ... Maybe ... I did.

-- Rowena G. Warner

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Grief

Doctor, I do not need your tranquilizers. I am not depressed, only saddened. You have also lost a friend. Do you need tranquilizers? No, you drink to fill the emptiness. Well, I do not drink and brood. I cry, and often: it keeps me from drowning. I have lost my last brother, my other self. I still feel his presence, you know. He is everywhere with me. But I need the whole of him, Here beside me as he's always been. He will always be our friend. Somehow we will find him again and Then I will cry for joy.

-- Patt Demetri

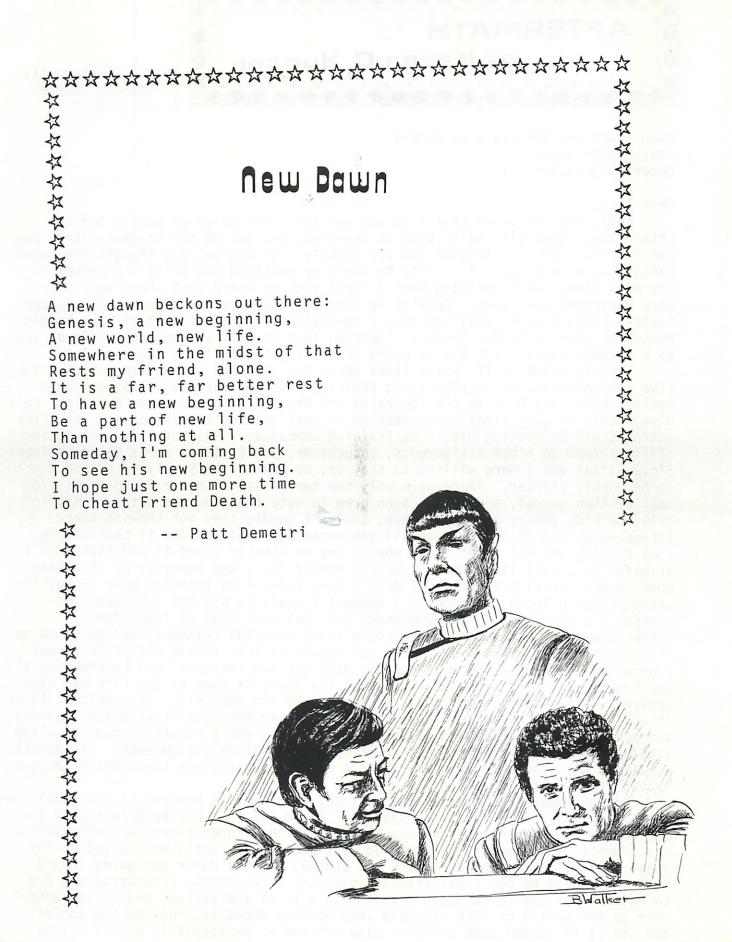
The Gift of Insight

Even as you died, Spock, You taught me something new. I'm young again, so alive again, Somehow--because of you.

The glasses have been shattered; Can't wear them anymore. And yet I see more clearly Than I ever did before.

Your action, Spock, has taught us What words could never say. No man has ever loved more Than to give his life away.

Debbie Gilbert





Starship Enterprise Earthbound Course Stardate 8142.3

Supply Officer Tessira n'ha Melora Starship Endeavor Ouadrant G Sector XII

Dear Tess,

Well, kid, it seems that I've won our bet. I'm Chief of Supply for the Enterprise. Next time we're both on Argelius, you owe me the biggest dinner you can imagine. I'm not letting you off lightly. Of course, you thought I'd never manage it, didn't you! I'm first to admit my ambition and drive are rather on the weak side, but I realized when I first came on board that there were other, more important qualities. Despite my five years as quartermaster's slave under Captain Kirk, I might still be only a specialist instead of a chief if I hadn't hooked my star up to Mr. Spock's. Getting that special assignment the first year as a science supply tech got me going in the right direction, and here I am.

Exactly where am I? Well, three years ago when the Enterprise finished the five year mission, we started doing training missions instead. That was when Captain Kirk went back to the admiralty and Mr. Spock took over as captain. He's always said -- many times in my hearing -- that he didn't want command, but Kirk outfoxed him by putting him in as Training Commander. Most of the other senior officers took on other assignments, thought Mr. Scott stayed on as Chief Engineer. Since Faisal and I were willing to stay on, he went up to Supply Chief and I got to be Supply Officer. There were only the two of us, since training crews are smaller than normal, and Faisal soon grew to hate the job. He hated having to tell the kids things more than once, couldn't handle them not knowing where things were, and griped through all the necessary explanations it took before they finally got his point. Two months ago he finally caved in and asked for a transfer to a full line ship. I braced myself for a new superior -- it's been work to get Faisal trained and I didn't look forward to starting over -- but instead, Captain Spock asked me if I thought I could handle the full job. Of course, I'm not a lieutenant commander yet, but that kind of thing doesn't bother him. He wanted someone he could trust with the trainees, and he asked me.

If I thought he needed it, I'd cut myself up into little pieces for Spock. I promised I'd work as hard as I could with the new trainees, and remembering all the trouble I had my first week, I had a few ideas of what to do. The new kids arrived, we got settled in, and things began to run smoothly. You wouldn't think it would. We had a small group of cadets on their absolute first space missions, some graduating cadets who were due to be ensigns, and a couple of command class lieutenants getting ready to take over more responsible assignments. Lt. Saavik, a Vulcan, was student commander. I kept an eye on her since she's not much young-

er than I; remarkable girl.

Do you remember the cruise we went on, with Captain Rondeau of the Hood? Unmitigated disaster, I've always thought. Spock had this cruise beautifully orchestrated -- everyone in the proper places at the proper times, well-thought-out assignments, you name it. Everything went beautifully until we started on the final cruise. By now Admiral Kirk was aboard, and the rumor was going around that this would be the final training mission. Afterwards, Enterprise was due to return to fully operational status. So most of the ensigns and lieutenants were up for berths on this ship and very nervous about it. Having the admiral and his staff aboard made everyone else nervous -- particularly on the bridge

where the older officers were supervising. Even my few supply trainees were jittery, though Lord knows why. Admiral Kirk never got a chance to run his

white gloves across the costume fabricator.

And now begins the tale. We had hardly been out at all, barely out of the Solar System, when Kirk got a personal call from Carol Marcus at Regula Spacelab, asking for help. I don't know why -- and never got a chance to ask Spock -- but the next thing I knew Kirk had taken over command, and we were scooting off towards Regulus as fast as those engines could scoot. It seemed kind of exciting, a break in the routine which I needed after three years stuck in training.

Then Khan attacked. You've seen the reports on that by now, I'm sure. We were running with shields down and almost were destroyed on the spot. The kids, trainees of all ages, initially collapsed under the pressure. It's one thing to go into battle fully psyched up. It's another to have the rug pulled out from under you totally unawares. Engineering took the worst of it, and some kids died. Scotty's nephew, Peter, one of the new midshipmen, was one of those. It takes a lot to scare me after eight years in space, but I had my hands full trying to keep my kids from panicking so we could help out as needed. I'm not sure if I got any sleep for three or four days -- I simply don't remember. There were so few senior officers on board: "a boatload of children", Kirk called us at one point. I did a lot of things other people would do ordinarily -- fetching and carrying, helping in Sickbay, even making sure the trainees ate dinner.

Kirk got us out from under that attack, but so much damage was done we could only limp on to Regulus and stay out of Khan's way. Power went back and forth from unreliable to almost non-existent, the shields and screens were useless, and we had to keep on just to find out what was going to happen next. We'd jury-rig something together, build up speed, and the damn thing wouldn't hold up. Turbo lifts were out from C deck down. Worst of all, the food machines could only turn out some disgusting kind of porridge. My inventory of Engineering equipment went from complete to nothing in about half a day. Scotty took everything he could and then some. We talked to each other in micro-sentences and polite tones. I know he took the failure of the ship personally, though it was Kirk's fault for trusting the Reliant. Yet, it wasn't Kirk's fault, not really. A "mistake" like

that is madeevery day between ships. No one ever died of it before.

Everything should have ended up just fine, however, since Kirk is really superior as a tactician. Eventually he pounded Khan to his knees. Anyone else would have surrendered, but Khan couldn't admit he'd been beaten. He set one final weapon on us, destroying himself in the process. He'd have got us, too,

if it hadn't been for Spock.

I can't write about this well, Tess. It sounds so melodramatic and hurts so much. The warp drive was off the line, and we had about four minutes to get out of range -- impossible. Knowing he couldn't survive the radiation, Spock went into the main reactor room and brought the energizer back up to nominal. And I knew nothing about it. That will haunt me forever: Spock died alone in a glass room, and most of us had no idea it was happening. By the time the radiation had dissipated enough so that someone could go in and bring his body out, though, I knew. I was the one who had to arrange for the coffin, find a Federation flag, and set up the details of the funeral. In my three years as Supply Officer I'd never been in charge before and had only helped Faisal once. Few people want a space burial. I spent the whole time snuffling back tears and trying to make things run as smoothly as possible. I owed Spock that, and more that I can never now repay.

Now we are heading to Alpha Ceti V to pick up any survivors from Reliant, the ones Khan marooned, and then will go back to Earth. Things are slowly being put right again, though no one has much heart for the work. There are too many reminders of what we've lost or left behind. Through all this, it is Admiral

Kirk who is keeping us together with quiet words to the shaken cadets, encouragement for the lieutenants, and a strong shoulder for the older officers. It's incredible, since Spock's death is sure to have affected him far more than anyone else aboard, but he seems to have gone ghrough his grief and come out again.

He's the only one who can say "Spock" without bursting into tears.
Yet the sadness is there. You can sense the loss in his eyes when he looks behind him on the bridge. Or like yesterday, when I was helping Saavik clear Spock's quarters to send his possessions home. Saavik was doing her very best Vulcan bravery routine; I was crying and snuffling into a tissue as I packed the transport container. Kirk saw us through the open door and came in. We kind of worked around him for awhile, sitting on the platform looking at an IDIC wall hanging. Then he kind of gave me a smile and asked if I'd included the framistantor. I couldn't help it -- I chuckled and said "I wouldn't have thought you'd remember that, sir." He shrugged. "I remember all my cadets, especially the troublesome ones." Then he rose and put one hand on my shoulder. "Don't grieve, Teri," he said, "just remember." He gave a glance to Saavik and left us alone.

That did help, a little, but after we finished packing Saavik and I sat talking for quite a while. I don't think she's had anyone to unload on and needed the Vulcan equivalent of a good cry. She obviously thinks of Spock sort of like a father, as I think of him as a mentor. Good thing he couldn't see the two of

us crying on each other's shoulders.

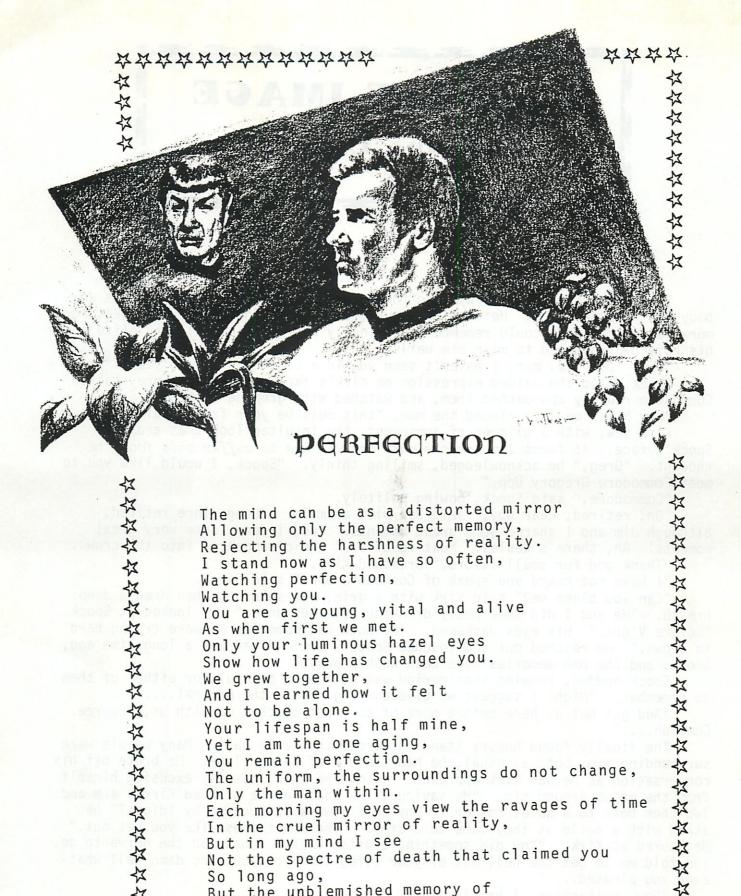
What happens now is anybody's guess. I don't even know if my job as Chief is any good or not. Kirk may decide to fill the position with a lieutenant commander, according to regs, if the rumor is true that he's taking over again as a real commander.

But you still owe me a dinner. See you on Argelius sometime in the next century. Maybe by then I'll feel like eating it.

Love,







The mind can be as a distoral Allowing only the perfect Rejecting the harshness of I stand now as I have so of Watching perfection, Watching you.

You are as young, vital and As when first we met.
Only your luminous hazel of Show how life has changed We grew together, And I learned how it felt Not to be alone.
Your lifespan is half mine Yet I am the one aging, You remain perfection.
The uniform, the surrounding only the man within.
Each morning my eyes view In the cruel mirror of real But in my mind I see Not the spectre of death the So long ago, But the unblemished memory Perfection. The mind can be as a distorted mirror Allowing only the perfect memory, Rejecting the harshness of reality. I stand now as I have so often, You are as young, vital and alive Only your luminous hazel eyes Show how life has changed you. Your lifespan is half mine, The uniform, the surroundings do not change, Each morning my eyes view the ravages of time In the cruel mirror of reality, Not the spectre of death that claimed you But the unblemished memory of

- Ginna LaCroix

REVERSE IMAGE by Ginną LąCroix

The ceremonies had been planned for a long time and everybody who was any-body was in attendance. Heihachiro Nogura, Commanding Admiral of Starfleet for more years than many could remember was finally retiring, and all the elite under his rule had gathered to wish him well.

"Jim! Damn it, man, I haven't seen you in a cluster of light years!"

Spock noted the pained expression on Kirk's face as a jovial, grey-haired

Commodore rapidly approached them, and watched with growing interest.

"Why bless me," continued the man, "this must be your famous Vulcan!"
Kirk saw, with a glimmer of amusement, the insulted look that crossed
Spock's face. At least I'm not the only one who has to suffer this fool, he
thought. "Greg," he acknowledged, smiling thinly. "Spock, I would like you to
meet Commodore Gregory Upp."

"Commodore," said Spock, bowing politely.

"Oh, retired, dear boy," said Upp with a smile. "Long since retired, although Jim and I shared some great moments. Yes, indeed, some very great moments! Ah, there's Wesley! Must be off..." He disappeared into the crowd.

"Thank god for small favors," breathed Kirk.

"I have not heard you speak of Commodore Upp," said Spock.

"Can you blame me?" said Kirk with a grin. He sobored, then drew a deep breath. "He and I did some heavy drinking together once." He looked at Spock. "Before V'ger." His eyes darkened. "We both had memories we were trying hard to drown." He reached out and touched Spock's arm. "That was a long time ago, Spock, and the bad memories have been washed away."

Spock nodded, knowing that period was no longer painful for either of them

to remember. "Might I suggest we give our regards to the Admiral...."

"And get out of here before more of our past catches up with us, I agree.

Come on...."

The finally found Nogura standing across the large hall. Many people were surrounding him, but, as usual, he had the air of being alone. He broke off his conversation as he saw Kirk approach. "Jim!" he said, hastily excusing himself from the group around him. "My saviour," he added as he grabbed Kirk's arm and led them both to a quiet corner. "Why am I always surrounded by idiots?" he asked with a smile as they came to a stop. "The smart ones like you get out." He looked at Kirk. "You did something I often wished I had had the nerve to do. You told me to get the hell out of your life, that you would do damn well whatever you pleased...."

"Now, Heihachiro, I hardly did...."

"You took charge of your life, Jim. Men rarely have the courage to do that." He glanced at Spock, then looked back at Kirk. "And you had the added courage to reach out for what you wanted most."

Spock turned his attention from Nogura to Kirk, only to find his commanding officer looking at him, the same question shining out of the hazel eyes that he

knew was in his own. Exactly what did Nogura mean? His words could be taken many ways, and all of them would be right. And to which of them had he been speaking?

"Ah, well, you don't have time to be bored by the ramblings of an old man," continued Nogura. "I know the Enterprise has been put behind schedule because of this silly gathering, a stupid waste of time for so many...."

"We came because we wanted to be here," said Kirk softly.

"In order to pay our respects to a good officer," added Spock with a slight

Nogura smiled as he shook his head. "Coming from you, I could almost believe No, gentlemen, you have work to do, lives to live, but I appreciate you taking the time to come." He looked around. "Now I had best get back to the people I like least." He reached out and took Kirk's hand in both of his. "Thank you for trying to cheer up an old man, Jim." He looked at Spock. "Take care of this hothead, Mr. Spock. Don't know that I'd trust him by himself." Before Kirk could bluster out a response, Nogura had walked away.

Spock reached out a hand to stop Kirk from going after him. "I believe the Admiral asked us to leave. You can gain nothing by going after him, hothead,

sir."

Kirk whirled around, then laughed softly. "Okay, I'll come quietly. I'll even accept hothead, but I can damn well look after myself, Mister, and don't you forget it!"

Kirk and Spock walked back to the shuttleport in silence. Spock kept glancing at Kirk, sensing he was preoccupied by something that was disturbing him. He said nothing as Kirk handed over the card to retrieve their shuttle, then they moved to the waiting area.

"Why do I feel so uneasy about Nogura, Spock?" he said finally.

"In what wav?"

Kirk ran his hand through his hair, then turned and looked out the window at the bright lights of the city. "All of Starfleet was there tonight, enough brass to start a spitoon company.... He looked back over his shoulder with a half smile. "To translate, a spitoon is...."

"I am familiar with the object," said Spock as Kirk fumbled for a des-

cription.

"That hall was packed and vet Nogura was...he was...."

"Alone?" supplied Spock helpfully.

Kirk nodded. "You saw it too." He turned back to Spock. "How? Why? I can understand the loneliness of his position, every officer has to hold his distance depending on his job. As Commanding Admiral, Nogura possibly had to more than any of us, but tonight.... Spock, he wasn't part of any group...." He was interrupted by a young cadet arriving with their shuttle. Unlike Spock, he missed the look of hero-worship shining from the boy's eyes.

Kirk set their course for the Enterprise before Spock answered him. "Jim, for the first time you are seeing Admiral Nogura as something other than the Commanding Admiral of Starfleet...."

"It's more than that, Spock."

"Yes, I know. He asked me to take care of you. Doesn't that tell you something?"

"Yeah, he still doesn't trust me out on my own."

Spock smiled slightly, then shook his head. "No, I think he's discovering something he has not let himself see for many years."

"Which is?" "He has no one to take care of him."

"What? Spock, that's nonsense! He's got his family...."

"He has his great-grandchildren who don't know him. None of his family

followed him into Starfleet, those he once served with have long since scattered. He is facing whatever future he has alone, and I would imagine he is feeling lost

and possibly a little frightened."

Kirk remained silent until the Enterprise came into view, then he contacted the bridge. The shuttlebay doors opened and he smoothly guided the small craft to its mooring. As they waited for the bay to pressurize, he finally looked over at the Vulcan. "I'm glad we have the Enterprise, Spock, and each other."

"Agreed," said Spock, his gentle smile breaking Kirk's somber mood.
"Agreed," said Kirk softly. "Well, we'd better break orbit, then think

about getting to bed. It's been one very long day."

An hour later Kirk and Spock left the bridge together, Spock heading for his quarters and Kirk planning to conduct his nightly tour of the ship.

"Jim, Spock, I've been trying to catch up with you for hours!" McCoy's

voice came from behind them. "You coming to the party?"

"Party?" echoed Kirk.

"Well, the two of you might be the only brass on this ship that Headquarters deemed worthy to invite to the real thing, but we lowly types are holding our own celebration for the change of command. Rec Room Seventeen."

Kirk felt an unexplained weariness settle over him and looked at Spock for support, only to find him staring at the ground. "All right, Bones," he said

with a sigh, "let me check up on things first."

"Great! See you later."

Kirk waited until McCoy had gone, then he turned to Spock. "The needs of the many," he started.

"Are more important than yours."

"I take it you aren't coming." Spock shook his head but offered no explanation. Kirk drew a deep breath. "You're leaving me alone, Spock. That wasn't what Nogura asked." He watched as Spock slowly moved away, almost like a shadow blending into darkness. Suddenly a pang of emptiness that he hadn't felt for years filled him. Blindly he turned and headed off to check the ship.

Nearing the end of his tour, the doors of the turbolift opened to let him out onto the bridge. Unlike the bustling scene that had been there when the Enterprise had been leaving orbit, only a few crewmembers remained, and they were securing their stations, switching over systems to be manned from auxiliary control.

"Oh, Sir, I didn't expect you back!"

Uhura's surprised and flustered voice caused Kirk to smile. "You may stay seated," he said softly. Uhura held her ground in the center seat as he came forward and swung the navigator's chair around, then sat down. "You'll get there, Uhura," he said, looking at the beautiful woman sitting opposite him.

She looked out at the starfield, then back at him. "I have achieved what

I want, sir."

Puzzlement clouded his eyes, but he decided not to pry. "You coming to the bash McCoy's organized?"

She shook her head. "I think not."

"You liven up any party," said Kirk hopefully. Uhura smiled slightly but said nothing. Finally Kirk got to his feet. "Well, I'll leave the ship in your capable hands." As he walked off the bridge, a shiver ran through him and he turned back. For a moment, everything blurred and nothing was there. Quickly trying to shake off the feeling, he ordered the turbolife to engineering.

The night personnel were working with quiet efficiency. A command crew is unnecessary as far as these people are concerned, thought Kirk as he walked along, noticing that none of the men here were young. How many officers have come and

gone since they first signed on, yet these are the people who keep everything humming, untouched by the changing of the rat race above them.

"Can I help you, sir?" A man he didn't recognize had stopped beside him.

"No, just looking around. Have you seen Mr. Scott?"

"He's been gone a long time, sir."

"Oh?" Kirk was surprised. It wasn't like Scotty to leave at shift's end, even if there was a party. "Well, I'll catch up with him later." The man looked at him oddly, then nodded and walked away. Kirk watched him, a little confused by his reaction, then shook his head and left.

"Oh, Captain, coming to the gym?"

Kirk stopped in his tracks. It had been mears since Sulu had called him that, and his heart felt warmed by the use of the one title he had cherished. "You not going to the party, Mr. Sulu?"

Sulu's face clouded. "Uh, no sir. I would like to but...." He looked

down at the foil in his hands. "You see, uh...."

Kirk chuckled. "But you need to practice. Chekov not with you?"

"No, sir," grinned Sulu. "I've arrived at the understanding that he can't be trusted. Put an idea in his head, a weapon in his hand, and you can kiss your life goodbye."

"I know what you mean," Kirk said fervently. "Well, you're probably smart not to come. Parties are one of society's abominations. They normally serve to

set people apart, not bring them together."

Sulu looked at him long and hard, then nodded and turned away.

Kirk stood for a few minutes feeling very alone. He had done everything he had set out to do, there was no longer any reason to put off attending the party. He walked back down the corridor, wishing that Spock was with him. Most of the time he enjoyed these get togethers, but attending Nogura's retirement ceremonies had shaken him a little.

"Getting older, Kirk," he said quietly. "You don't like change any more than Spock. Nogura has always been there, now he's gone. Face up to it, life

is change and you have to accept it."

The growing noise told him the party was in full swing. Squaring his shoulders, he walked into the room with determination. At least Bones would be there....

Thunderous applause broke into Kirk's daydream. He looked up in surprise to see everyone in the vast hall on their feet, all smiling at him and applauding vigorously. "What the....?"

"It's time for your speech, Admiral."

"Speech?" Kirk looked at the man beside him, a man who was familiar but

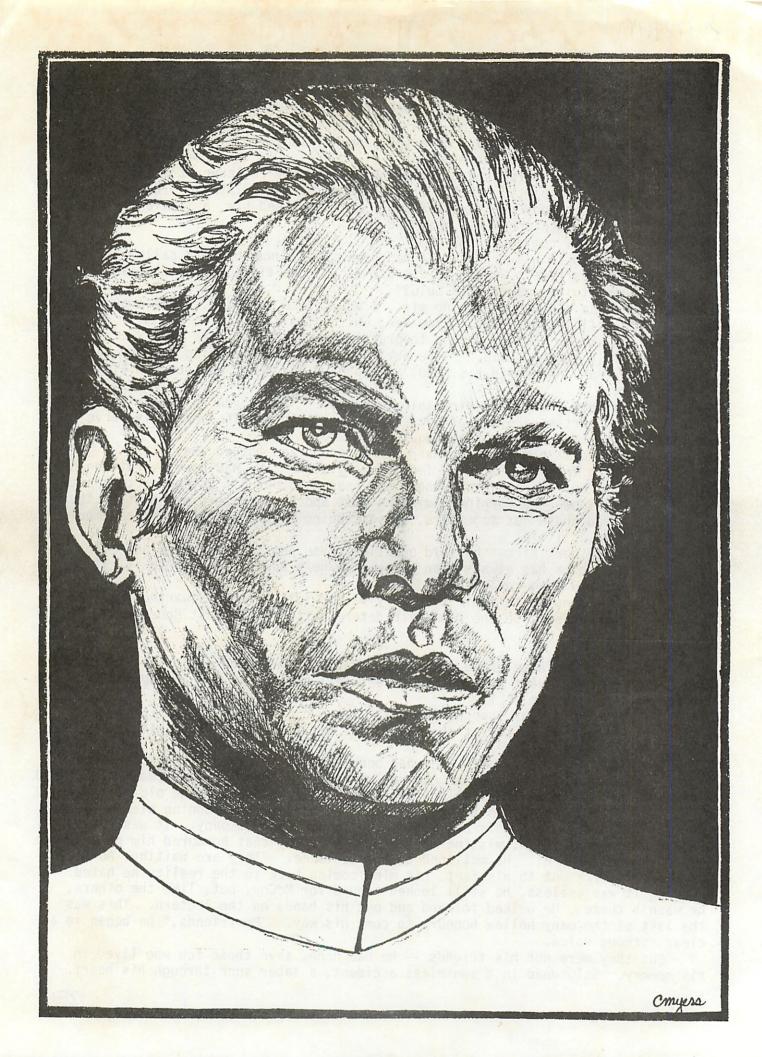
whom Kirk couldn't place.

The aide smiled patiently. He had been with Kirk for many years. He had not had the privilege of knowing the Admiral when he had been in his prime, when he had been making the legends that all of Starfleet knew. He served the old man whose mind was as sharp as a computer on matters dealing with the running of Starfleet, but who somehow lived in his own world, keeping his own company. It was obvious he had been there again, missing most of the ceremony that honoured him on this the day of his retirement. He motioned to the audience. "They are waiting, Admiral."

Slowly Kirk got to his feet, his mind coming back to the reality he hated. Knowing it was useless, he still looked around for McCoy, but, like the others, he wasn't there. He walked forward and put his hands on the lectern. This was the last of the many hollow honours to come his way. "My friends," he began in a

clear, strong voice.

But they were not his friends -- he had none, save those few who lived in his memory. Sulu dead in a senseless accident, a saber sunk through his heart.



Uhura and the *Enterprise* had died saving a galaxy, a fitting tribute to both. Scotty had always sworn he would retire and die, and he had. Gentle, compassionate McCoy had died as he had lived, trying to save lives. Spock...Spock had shown him what the sacrifice of love really was. He had never tried to replace these people, he knew he never could.

"....and so, in conclusion, I would like to thank all of you for giving up

your time and coming here to honour an old man."

As the applause rose again, Kirk saw the lonely old man standing in a crowd but this time he knew it was not Nogura, but himself. Thousands had come to honour him, but even in that vast number he was facing a future alone and, like Heihachiro Nogura had so many years ago, James T. Kirk was feeling lost and more than a little frightened.



